Bad Witch

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Bad Witch

by justlikeyouimagined

Summary

Squicky, upsetting, and generally bad news, please read tags: this fic is not for everyone. Detective Graham's empathy manifests as an impulse that he has to work constantly to keep in check. Sometimes, he craves a way to let himself go, just for a short while. One evening, Hannibal is there to indulge him. Hannibal quickly develops an obsession.
Can be read as complete. Last chapter will be an epilogue.

Notes

Hello! So this is a continuation from one of my Goretober fics (Day 28: Drugs). Chapter 1 is a copy of that ficlet (for anyone new), and then Chapter 2 is where it picks up. It gets exceptionally explicit and very much Not For Everyone pretty much immediately in Chapter 2, so check the tags, read the warnings, and enjoy if you'd like.

I don't know what the hell I'm doing here, but I have an itch.

See the end of the work for more notes

- Translation into 中文-普通话 國語 available: Bad Witch (中文翻譯) by rainylaiho

Chapter 1

His vice was for letting go; for being made to let go. Everyday, he funneled his energy inward to keep himself separated from the rest. To lose his focus - to get too distracted by a phrase or a bruise or a smile - meant that suddenly he would be waist deep in the muck of someone else's mind. He couldn't abide it, the way he and *they* would blur. So he focused, and stayed himself, and that was mostly fine.

But sometimes, everything got to be too much. He'd drink then. Of course, the alcohol only dulled his inhibitions, but it also made him care less about holding the line. He might devour accents and relate other's misadventures as if they were his own, but after five or six drinks, it didn't bother him quite as much that he couldn't untangle himself from everyone else.

Still, to slough off his control and give it over to the mercy or malice of another: that was a rare, and lusted-after gift. Alcohol could only do so much. He needed the opportunity to give up, to be forcibly held down and put under.

When he realized his drink was dosed, a small thrill tickled the base of his skull. He hid his smile around his glass, finishing it off in a few quick swigs. Begin timer: Now.

He had the perpetrator narrowed down to two, though he would readily admit (if anyone would ask) that he was only including the boy to add a suggestion of mystery to his evening. He'd been attractive enough, if a touch dim. They'd talked for the better part of 15 minutes before he'd realized he was only talking to his reflection: the same tones, same inclinations, insecurities, intentions, all absorbed by the young man before him, turned a half degree and thrown carelessly back at its source. Maybe not dim. Maybe just hopeful. Regardless, it wasn't him, really. He wasn't the type.

No, it was the other one. The one he'd caught sight of as soon as he'd walked in. Regardless of how carefully shabby his chosen outfit, or how expertly he mimicked the existential exhaustion that slumped down the shoulders of half of the bar's patrons - it was simply impossible for him not to notice the 30-something in the corner. Will suspected that man's failing would inevitably be his command over a room. When he would need to be discrete, he would never be able to hide well enough in plain sight. He could clearly picture it, ten, maybe twenty years from now if he was lucky, finally brought to his knees in a mass of people that he couldn't quite bring himself down enough to emulate. It was a funny feeling, the way Will felt *disappointed* when he slipped, for a moment, into the man. Not angry, not scared. *Inconvenienced*. He think he liked him already.

So it was him then. It wouldn't take long, he wagered, with his size and the amount of booze in his blood already. He pushed the empty glass towards the bartender and somewhat clumsily moved himself through the crowd to the toilets. When he allowed himself a last look over at the table where the man had been, it was already occupied by another group. Fucking slippery, that one. He liked that, too.

He noticed the drug's effects first as a general weariness, subtle enough that he might have attributed it to overstimulation from being around the crowd and their persistent, noisy thoughts for so long. This wasn't his scene, but he'd needed something after today. Work was difficult for him, at times. Not the work itself - the day to day bordered on blessedly banal. But once in a while, there'd be a case - it didn't matter what - where he'd slip, *just for a second*. Then all it would take was one revealing picture, one probing question during an interview, and he would flood. The invading *otherness* would come on so suddenly, he could easily forget the right now and choke on the briny overflow of the other's past. It overwhelmed him when it hit, left him floundering against the crashing assault. So sometimes, he needed a fucking drink to make him not care that so many strangers could stomp around in his mind.

But it wore him down, the people. He wasn't sleeping anyway; it didn't take much. If he hadn't suddenly felt the liquid iron trickle down his spine to settle heavy in his limbs, he might have attributed his fatigue to the day and the people and the noise, and he would have headed home. It was something more though, he knew. He was just a touch too graceless, just a bit too uncoordinated to blame on just the drink and his insomnia. This was the man's design; that was just fine with Will.

He left the bar and staggered, hands clinging from door frame to window sill to brick wall, out and down the alley where he knew he'd be waiting. When his ankle turned, feet too stubbornly heavy to navigate the pot-holed ground, he knew he'd grab him as he fell.

His eyelids drooped, his vision was doubling, but he could still see well enough to know it was him. He was helpless, dosed and growing loopier for it, caught up in the arms of the stranger who held him like he weighed no more than a doll.

He smiled: a dazed, foggy sort of smile. "Will you stay long enough to fuck me again when I wake up?" he said, though it was a great effort to keep his words clear.

That caught him by surprise, he saw. His brow arched and he looked down at him with sort of vague amusement. "You know it was me," he said. His accent was thick and unfamiliar, it purred and nuzzled deep into his brain.

Will nodded slowly. "I don't mind. Honest," he said quietly while struggling to find his footing enough to stand. Everything felt too hard, not worth the effort. He should just close his eyes, trust the next few hours to someone else. This one seemed especially capable.

"You anticipate my motivations are sexual," the man said, shifting Will in his grip so that he could drape his arm around his shoulder. He felt stronger than he had seemed, the layers of costume hiding sinewy muscle.

"Hmm, they usually are," Will responded, rubbing at his blurring eyes.

"And if they aren't? Are you as flippant with your life as you are with your body?"

The question gave Will pause, made him stand up a bit straighter, look a little closer at the man for something that he might have missed before. Sure, this was a bit careless of him. That was the point. But he'd never been wrong, before.

He wasn’t sure if it was the drug’s apathy that blunted his ability to slide into the other man’s mind, or if what looked over at him was just a shell. *That’d* be an interesting development, he thought, then weakly chastised himself for his own sloppiness. He squinted, as if the doubles of the man might align again with the renewed effort. There *was* something else, he thought. Something prowling below. Something he thought maybe he should have been more scared of sneaking a peak at.

“You won't hurt me, not really,” Will said, finally deciding. He reached a loose limb out to rest his hand indelicately against the warm skin of the man's neck. His thumb dragged over the jugular, up and down, mollifying. “You - I don't care much what you do, what you need from me when I'm out. Just stay a while after, too?” The way his last words fell from his lips sounded more desperate than he'd intended. But he was dizzy and nauseous and entirely too tired to care.

The man stared at Will. It was too dark in the alley, but Will thought he might have been smiling. “I find myself reconsidering my initial plans,” he said, at last. And then Will knew. He'd wake up. Sore, bloody, used, but alive. Maybe not alone.

“Is up t’you, I guess - I'm just… tired. Gonna resta bit.” Will shrugged, as well as he could with one arm slung over the man. His head lulled on his shoulders, the effort of staying upright was beginning to be too much. He let more of his weight rest against the other man, his feet tripping over each other, toes dragging more than walking.

“Very well, you rest. Perhaps a bit later, you'll tell me more of this self-destructive streak you seem to indulge,” the man said, not unkindly. Will only huffed a response before closing his eyes and surrendering to the comforting blankness that came with giving in.

Chapter 2

Chapter Notes

> This may have squicky bits for people - Will is drugged and Hannibal is less than gentle with him. It kinda sets the tone for whatever else is to come. So please proceed with caution and don't read stuff that makes you feel bad, yeah?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The limpness of the young man's limbs reminds him at first of a doll he'd had as a boy. It's inherently unappealing - the memories make it doubly so - though he's familiar enough by now with the sour taste of contempt run amok that he can easily divert his thoughts away from the pseudo-lifelessness before him. It's an inconvenience of the drugs, little more.

Usually, he would transport them, restrain them, and then return when the effects had worn off. It was better that way; his satiation in the upcoming act benefited from an audience. It was their smell, more than anything. To take them awake and agonizingly aware of their end *reeked* in the most unimaginable, inimitable way. Usually, once his cross hairs fell over his target, he was locked in.

Usually.

Will had changed his mind though, truly. It was a dangerous turn, he conceded, though his alternate plan had already blossomed on the short ride here. This might be interesting, too.

They'd barely spoken; there should be no reason for Hannibal to already feel what he does, especially not as strongly as he does. There is no denying it, though: there is something about him, this boy flopped down across the bed. That is plain enough.

A new plan. A detour. For the benefit of the young thing laid helpless before him, he told himself. Once he'd seen the man - really *seen* him close up in the alley, something in him slithered out and demanded: *not yet, not yet, not yet*.

So, he'll live.

Hannibal paces about the unfamiliar living room, deep in thought. The dog is out back, whining quietly to protest the change in routine. *He doesn't bring them home*, he thinks, and idly runs his fingers along the tops of well-worn books about forensics, voodoo, inshore fishing.

Will Graham. Thirty-one, 5'10, 190lbs, organ donor, coffee drinker, and apparent resident of the abode to which they now found themselves. When he'd checked Will's wallet for his address, he'd found a seeming purposeful lack of any other commonplace details that one might normally overlook: no receipts stuffed in, no loyalty cards to a grocery chain, no well-

worn and carefully guarded note from a child or a lover. Driver's license, credit card, coffee rewards card, the end.

He attempts to fill in the details as he circles the small home. Even here though, something is missing. It's a lived-in space, sure: loose change on the counter next to unopened mail, bits of dog food littered about the cupboard where the bag no doubt is stored, fishing rods hung along a back wall. Nevertheless something is off, the way photos in home decor catalogues look over-considered in their homeliness.

Yes, Will Graham has to live. He has *questions*.

For Will, and for himself. For now: how much concession is he willing to give to the fancy of the lax boy in the next room? He has time, but what of it? With anyone else, the drug-induced fugue would render him a virtual stranger; he could do all manner of indecencies to them, introduce himself again not 24 hours later, and be met with eyes that would shine with a friendly and complete lack of familiarity. With Will Graham, he wasn't as sure.

Reckless, yes. And yet, his body buzzes with an unexpected anticipation.

From the bedroom's doorway, he regards the younger man: his breath slight but even, it pulls a shallow 'V' between his collar bones on the inhale. Hannibal lurks slowly towards the bed, then after no more than a heartbeat of hesitation, he crawls up over Will's body. Because it isn't Will there, is it? Just a shadow; certainly not Will. So he can crawl atop him, and examine this thing in a way he wouldn't be so forward to allow himself if circumstances were different.

His skin is achingly smooth, and clammy from the mingling of drugs and the day's remnant heat. It makes the thin fabric of his shirt cling against sinewy muscle and bone. He's slim, but strong. Hannibal could overpower him, probably, but that might have more to do with skill than brute strength. His mind suddenly flashes a sequence of future events: Will with him against a wall, his arms twisted behind his back. Apprehended. His flesh breaks out in gooseflesh before he calms himself and plays out five different ways to out-maneuver the man, gain an advantage.

He is beautiful, of course, but that isn't what's changing the rules tonight. There's something there, something *more* magnificent than beauty and a lack of self preservation. Because that isn't really what had happened, had it? Will hadn't been quite so thoughtless - a bit foolish, sure, but not without thought. He'd done his own assessment and, for whatever reason, found Hannibal lacking a murderer's follow-through. At least, in this particular scenario. What fascinated Hannibal most was how Will had known before he had. A lucky guess?

Hannibal trails his hand along the edges of Will's soft hair, his finger tangling in the loose curls that wrap themselves around his face. He'd said it was okay, after all. He'd wanted to be wanted. And Hannibal, hovering over this body, realizes that he *wants* what Will wants, too. He feels a swelling intoxication at the prospect of *taking* what he'd so willingly proffered in the alley.

He undresses Will first, delicately. This isn't a medium through which to perform his art. This is another person: a loaner. He will give this one back. And so, he will be careful when it

matters.

When he has him naked, Hannibal moves him so that he lays as though sleeping. There is a small thrill in the images that this sets of: of manipulating Will's body and then going further, then further still. He suspects Will has some experience in the matter to stay as calm as he had been in the alley, but he is also quite sure the others hadn't used him in the way Hannibal wants to now. His thoughts are barely recognizable through the sticky veil of crimson.

Not yet.

His hands spread wide against Will's smooth skin, and moves to memorize the way his muscles wrap over bone. There are remnant scars littered across his body; old, whitened things that have stretched with his skin as he's grown. Signs of a challenging past, and a resilience that Hannibal might already be starting to admire.

He is entirely too pliable like this, in the same way a body is soon after death. In many ways, they are not altogether dissimilar now, though the preternatural stillness of a corpse is always painfully obvious. He never had felt this sort of pull towards his bodies.

He scans the space for a tool and sees an empty wine bottle beside the wastebasket. A cheap vintage, he notes, and reaches out to collect it.

He won't bother with lube: if the point is to satisfy some self-destructive whimsy in the man below, then the pain will be part of the charm. Still, as he parts his cheeks, he directs the lip of the bottle slowly against the relaxed pucker of his ass and teases it against his rim until its narrow opening pushes in with minimal resistance.

Will doesn't respond at all at first. As he continues to push the bottle, forcing it deeper over the course of several minutes, Hannibal basks in his occasional twitches. There's still time, though it's coming to an end. The small ways his body begins to respond reminds him that he is alive, here for him. It catches Hannibal's attention and he pushes the bottle in to its widest point. A deeply sedated and confused moan slips out.

Will's stretched ass is red, lightly bleeding. Hannibal leans himself down, resting his cheek against his cheek so he can surround himself the blood's aroma. Though he has grown hard as he'd worked the bottle in, the core of his appreciation for the smell and taste and sight of another's insides goes will beyond sexual.

With the bottle lodged deep between Will's cheeks, Hannibal lifts himself off the bed to undress. No, this isn't only sexual, but tonight has transformed into a night for indulgence. It is a heady thought, to consider what he'd feel like to be taken this way, already pliant and worked loose. The way he might be able to position Will, to bend and twist and test the way he stretches. He pictures the way he might look, knees to his ears, arms wrapped around himself and secured there: his own bundle to suck and fuck and fist.

But Will is coming to, little by little. He doesn't have long if he wants to leave. *If*, he marvels at his lack of discretion. When. But not yet. It isn't enough to stuff him full. He feels a responsibility to the boy; he must leave him enough of an ache to know he's been used the way he so clearly craved. Hannibal's hand wraps around his cock as he moves back toward

the bed. Before him lays an anachronism, surely. A Botticelli, misplaced in time. What number of poses he might be able to place him in, like this. And after death. A glorious tableau.

Not yet.

He retrieves a condom and when he moves back onto the mattress, it is to straddle Will's chest. With pillows on either side of his head, he moves him until his mouth lays loosely ajar. Enough space to tease the tip of his cock inside.

He'd defiled them once before, more as an inevitable experiment than out of any real desire. He'd found it entirely uninspiring, and had resolved to keep his carnal and murderous hedonism separated from that point forward. But this insentient state that Will is in - entirely malleable but with the breath and heat of the living - offers a liminal space he hasn't considered properly before. When he pushes his cock all the way past Will's parted lips, the warm slack feeling makes his stomach flip. *Oh*.

He is too forceful at first, and triggers Will's reflexes, leaving him gagging softly, eyes fluttering in a futile effort to rouse himself. Hannibal pulls back some, sliding his cock in and out of the moist warmth of Will's mouth more slowly, only occasionally dipping in further to recreate the same soft choking noises and feel the way Will's throat contracts around his head.

When he is close, he tucks his thumb in with his cock, pressing it against the hinge of Will's jaw. His other hand pinches his nostrils and he fucks deep into his mouth, savoring the undulation of Will's tongue as he struggles to push out the obstruction. Hannibal imagines he holds him down until his weak struggles cease, then shoots his mess deep into the boy's throat. He imagines cleaning the body, slicing into its supple flank, ripping from him a feast so that he might carry a trace of this curiosity with him forever. Delightful.

Will chokes in earnest on Hannibal's final push, his stomach going taut and his body curling up on itself. The movement pushes against the bottle, and it slides out partially, then completely when Will shudders and begins to cough. There is something deeply satisfying here that Hannibal would have refused had anyone else offered it to him. He finds that he does not miss the opportunity to take him, at least not nearly as much as he'd imagined he might.

Hannibal takes a final look at Will before he quickly gathers his things, redresses in the hallway, and slips out the front door.

Chapter End Notes

I promised myself I wouldn't do a multi-chapter fic, but then there was an itch in my brain and here we are. This is wildly self-indulgent; I have no plans for this except a

bunch of words that I'll probably rewrite before they get posted here. Will and Hannibal have more scenes to come, just not yet.

I'm on twitter and tumblr as trikemily if you want to say hi.

Chapter 3

Chapter Notes

Notes about potential TWs at the end

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Nothing about the day had settled right with Will. There were always people, it was a hazard of the job. He's been cloistered in the precinct all day though, and being around colleagues was always more draining than when he was among strangers. With strangers, they might look or shift or shrug in such a way so as to lay bare some crumb of themselves to whet Will's empathetic appetite. Without substance, without their history, it was easier. When they were strangers, there was a thinness to the veil of otherness that might enshroud him without warning - he was still vulnerable to their influence, but at least he could still feel himself prowling underneath. With few exceptions, the longer he got to know someone, the harder it was to keep a strong separation.

And so, he kept to himself a lot.

Thompson was alright enough though. She was the definition of an open book; he didn't need his party trick to take one look at her entering their shared alcove and know if she'd broken up with her partner, or cried herself to sleep, or gone off with friends until the wee hours of the night. Her experiences, and the emotions and behaviours that they conjured, were *simple*. He appreciated that; could tolerate that. He'd been considering going back to school before she'd come on as his new partner. Eventually he still might, maybe, but he could do this a bit longer with her.

The rest of the precinct, well, they were people. Like any others. They acted impulsively, oftentimes illogically, but to Will, their ambitions and intentions unwound before him the moment he let his guard down. When they spoke to him about a case, or a new assignment, or their kid's school recital: if he paid too close attention (as was his habit of doing) he risked losing himself in some sliver of their past lives, laid bare in the history of how their microexpressions subtly shifted the lines of their faces.

He tried his best not to look, he did. Sometimes though, it just *happened*.

"Hey - you good?" It was Thompson beside him, careful not to land her hand against his shoulder. It hovered above it for a moment before she remembered and tempered her natural need to nurture, pushing her hands into the pockets of her slacks.

Of course he wasn't. Of course. The photos in front of them weren't worse than any others, but it never mattered. He had made the mistake of looking, not at the wounds, or the spray, or the weapon. He had looked at her ring finger, and the purple-red love bite that was unusually

placed along the inner bend of her elbow, and the way her bare toes showed off her attentiveness to her self-care, a fresh pedicure the colour of her blood.

And it was enough to sink into her mindset. He had created in the reflection of her gaze the lover that had come for her: younger, unsteady, desperately needing validation after a string of recent failures. He could feel her fear, and the too-mild surprise which suggested that maybe, she felt she'd deserved this. If he wasn't careful, he could, *he would* live it all again.

It was the impetus for both his desire to join homicide in the first place, as well as his increasing consideration of leaving it.

Will nods, swallowing down the dryness in his throat. "Yeah," he says. He rubs his eyes aggressively behind his glasses. "I think I need to get a good coffee, you want something?"

"Whatever you're getting, yeah?" Thompson says, her concern easily quelled by Will's admission of fatigue instead of empathy overload. Simple. Will grabs his ID and heads for the exit.

As soon as his eyes adjust to the brightness, he spots him. He's attentive, but since Will has come from a half-forgotten side entrance, his focus is directed nearly 180 degrees in the wrong direction. It gives him ample time to slip behind the large live oak and decide his next step.

It'd been weeks since the bar. He's only recently managed to get through a night without some remnant memory uncurling within his subconscious and redirecting his dreams. Delicious, frustratingly abstract scenes that he feels and smells more than sees. Though his mind has finally settled some, his body is apparently more resistant. For the span of several seconds, Will feels his limbs grow noticeably heavier and less receptive to his intentions. He leans against the green-brown bark, pulling his focus away from imagined memories and towards the man across the street.

He's here for him, that much is obvious. He doesn't bother considering how the man has tracked him. Even knowing nothing about him, Will has no trouble creating a profile of the overdressed, excessively groomed man that might include this particular skill set. It doesn't matter, anyway: the fact is that he is here, now. He's sitting in the black BMW, unreasonably still and singularly focused. Will pictures a lioness, calm among the tall grasses, waiting. Assessing.

The impression is not altogether unwelcome, a low pang deep in his groin reminds him. The timing, however, is inconvenient. Besides, though Will had come out of their last encounter satisfied - blissfully achingly satisfied, really - there was *something* different about the man in the car that had the effect of making the hairs on the back of his neck stand tall.

Will knows he's been spotted almost immediately when he steps out from behind the tree. The man's face reveals no surprise at being noticed. So it's a watching game. Both comfortable being the focus of the other's attention.

He's out of his car by the time Will crosses the narrow street. He steps back onto the sidewalk, inviting Will to do the same. "You are more predictable than I first imagined you

would be," he says, by way of a greeting.

"I'm sorry to disappoint," Will retorts. They stand facing each other, waiting. Will takes a step closer, breaching any comfortable distance remaining between them. Any other person would react, for better or for worse. The shell in front of him has no such tells.

"You want a coffee? There's a shop around the corner."

"I know."

"You've watched me there too I suppose?" Will asks, and feels a mild surprise as how casual he manages to feel.

The man's eyes glint. He reaches his hand up, his finger sliding lightly across the edge of Will's ear. Will shivers, then shudders more to himself for allowing the reaction.

"You're working," he states.

"I am."

"You're police."

"Homicide."

The man hums. The edge his nail catches the thin flesh behind Will's ear in a seemingly accidental snag. Will's heart speeds up, a prickling tightness swelling across his lungs and up over his collarbones.

"Let me do it again," he half-whispers. When he leans in, the space between them nearly disappears. Will feels his breath against his lips. The man is perfectly odorless, only warm and clean. Will can suddenly only smell himself: instant coffee and stale bagels at the precinct, two days of nearly nonstop work and associated grime layered on his skin.

His gaze shifts about the man's face, skating off sharp cheekbones and pouted lips, unwilling to settle on any one feature as a force of habit. Finally, he makes himself lock in on Hannibal's eyes, expecting the nauseating pull into the man before him, the blurring of self with other. He let his guard down, come what may.

But: nothing. He stays exactly as he is. Will, standing before another man. Separate. His eyebrows scrunch in puzzlement before he has the sense to quelch his reaction.

"You didn't stay, last time." His voice is steady, but he feels anything but. Light-headed, and still very much himself. *Curious*.

"Necessary then, though I've come to regret my decision." He's moved in closer still, as if gravity demands it of him, though he manages to hover short of contact. But then the man swallows, and his lip twitches, and it grazes against the side of Will's mouth. It feels like ice water; the shock of it shoots up his nerves.

"What are you?" he asks. He registers the mild awe that has spoiled his steady tone.

“Perhaps, it is best that we begin with who.” The words are spoken between mouths, directly inside the bodies of the other. Will’s breath catches in a hitch and he steps back because he might crush himself against his bespoke suit otherwise. The man drops his finger from the edge of his face.

He shakes his head. “No, I don't care about who.”

“Dr. Hannibal Lecter,” he says, ignoring Will. It makes him flinch at the purposeful intrusion of names and the built-in histories they reveal within his mind. “What am I? An interesting question. For now it would appear, against better judgment perhaps, that I am simply an admirer.”

“Simply.” Will parrots the word back, then considers what Hannibal doesn't say. Hannibal seems to allow it, even standing taller for Will's penetrating stare.

He squints as he thinks, his tongue slipping out to wet the inner edges of his lip. “Will you leave again?” he asks.

He isn't entirely sure why this is important to him, now, with *Doctor* Lecter, but it is. Absolutely necessary. Without it, he'll need to tamper down the embers burning white hot in his gut and leave.

Hannibal smiles victoriously - that is what has happened, isn’t it? he's won? - and nods. “My home this time. Tonight? Around 8. I’d like to cook for you first. You are welcome as my guest for as long as you'd prefer.”

Now that he can, now that he seems invulnerable to falling, Will cannot help but stare. He realizes too late that he's missed his window to respond; Hannibal has already pulled a thick business card and a pen from his jacket pocket and is writing his personal address on the back in ornamental script.

Hannibal offers the card to Will, who takes it with vaguely masked suspicion. Then he pockets the card and nods, before stepping back and away towards the coffee shop.

Hannibal doesn't turn to watch him, he can tell. Apparently, he's done enough of that already.

“You're only here for a couple months?” Will asks later that evening, before taking a sip of the wine offered to him upon entering the kitchen. He takes in the century-old home with sweeping glances. Easily triple the size of his small shotgun 20 minutes east of here.

“Yes, the internship at Charity will keep me through to July,” Hannibal answers. As though he were looking through Will’s eyes - *is this what he looks like when he slips?* - Hannibal takes in his home. “A rental, I’m afraid. I’ve grown more attached to the house than I had planned.”

“Only the house?” Hannibal gives Will a small nod as if to thank him for providing the opportunity to flirt. The sight of it makes his head pound with a sudden rush of blood.

“The city harbors many curiosities.”

“How many of its residents have you started stalking?” Will asks bluntly.

Hannibal tilts his head and grins. “Only a small handful at a time. And none nearly as confounding, I assure you.” Hannibal’s smile fades when Will reacts with a dismissive huff. “I have thought of you often, Will.”

The weight of the admission feels too heavy for so few words, and he shifts uncomfortably under its burden. This isn't his usual approach, accepting dinner and a drugging; the idea of finding himself with the same partner twice sets himself more on edge than any dodgy situation he’s put himself in over the last several years.

“Have you discovered a new fascination at my expense, Doctor?”

Hannibal turns to the pans on the stove, away from Will. The silence stretches and feels electric. Without meaning to, Will takes in the posture and mannerisms of the man before him as he cooks.

Hannibal is confident, clearly. But there is something unsettled in him that Will suspects few have ever been privy to see. His seeming gracefulness about his space feels to Will like shackles that reign another beast in and away from others. He shakes his head lightly to rid himself of the idea. It doesn't matter, really. He'd known it was something and he'd come anyway.

“What are you making me?” Will asks, finishing his wine and holding it to Hannibal's attention to ask if he'd also like a refill.

“Red shrimp & crab ravigote, followed by a swordfish Pontchartrain.” Hannibal nods towards the sauce roiling in the pan, then smiles at the flash of impressed surprise that flickers across Will's face. “I'm nearly done, why don't you take a seat in the dining room.”

The room is heavily polished dark woods and delicately lit curios cabinets that loom imposingly over the intentionally short dining table. Will feels too big, an obscenity in a disproportionate room. He gulps his wine out of habit. Usually, it was the people in the rooms and not the room itself that throws him.

Hannibal enters moments later with two small plates, each with small helpings of ravigote arranged atop endive and garnished with colourful thin wisps of vegetables stacked tall about the seafood. He finds he enjoys Hannibal’s satisfaction in impressing him, so he grins a little wider than he feels proper to egg the man on.

As the dishes are served, it’s surprisingly easy to keep up the twisting conversation. A doctor, a traveler, a patron of the arts, a fucking damn fine chef. They have virtually nothing in common and perhaps, he doesn’t mind. The more he learns, the more confident he is of what he had felt instinctively before: the only reason Hannibal was at the bar that night was to take

him. He considers for a moment whether Hannibal might have been following him before that night. He doesn't know, and that pokes at him. He hasn't wished to fall into another person's mind for years now, but the thought blinks bright in his head, fleeting as lightning before it is gone again.

Will lets himself become increasingly more inebriated, since that's the point of it, isn't it? But he's enjoying this, he realizes with some surprise. Once the last plate is cleared, he might be incautious enough to use the word comfortable in describing how he is feeling. It's a near impossibility when he's around others. He doesn't know what to do with himself, so he continues to accept Hannibal's offers to refill his glass. Eventually, he cares a little less about how uncomfortable comfortable makes him.

When the last plate is cleared, Will focuses himself enough to walk rather smoothly into the front sitting room. By the fireplace, a mahogany table stands with a small pewter tray. He sees the syringe, antiseptic wipe, the gauze. Will spins to face Hannibal faster than he intends, and visibly flinches when he rounds on him standing so close. His stomach lurches while his heart speeds up a beat.

He doesn't retreat away. No, once he is steady again, he leans in, inviting Hannibal to do the same. Hannibal draws his nose to Will's upper jaw. He unabashedly takes a lingering breath; his exhale comes out in a pleased sigh.

"Are you amenable?" Hannibal asks, tilting his head so the expelled air brushes against the edge of his neck. Will lulls a bit under his attention, his body anticipating the forgiving weariness that will soon spill through the needle's tip.

"If I wasn't?" As he speaks, he lifts head up and back, exposing the freshly shaven paleness of his neck.

"What do you think?" Hannibal asks, his lips touching against the warm skin just below his jaw. The pressure was feather light, a suggestion more than an application of a touch.

"You had no intention of having me leave tonight," Will answers, the words resonating as they feed back into his auditory cortex. His lips pull tight in a frown when he adds, "Do you intend to let me leave at all?"

Hannibal's breath hitches at once, before he parts his lips in response, his teeth scraping too roughly along his skin. He makes a soft, satisfied sound as his tongue flicks out, taking the evening's first taste.

Alarms are sounding for him now; Will knows exactly what he should do, cornered as he is by a predator. Hannibal is dangerous around others. Very possibly, he is dangerous around Will. This game, he's too old for this sort of self-destructive bullshit. He should leave.

Instead, he tucks his chin down, taking Hannibal's mouth with his own. The room blurs with prickling electricity, his body dances in the sparking, buzzing tides that push him bodily into the man before him.

“I'm too easy a target,” he says between mouthfuls. His chest feels in turns empty and full to bursting. His hands grip Hannibal's crisp button-down, feeling the taught muscle underneath.

Hannibal pauses at that, pulling apart just enough to speak. “You underestimate yourself, Will.”

Will chuckles, a self-deprecating noise. He steps away, allowing the distance between them to shield him from Hannibal's inclinations. A part of his body is screaming for him to run. It’s enthralling.

“I don't think I'm wrong about you,” he says, his voice low.

“You may not be exactly right, either,” he admits, wrapping his arms around Will's trim waist.

Will's hands go to Hannibal's chest, holding space between them. He looks insistently back and forth between his eyes, at a loss without the ability to leak in behind his outward masks. The man in front of him is anything, he realizes.

“You affect me differently than others,” Hannibal says, his face contorting into a look reminiscent of confusion.

“You don't affect me at all,” Will returns, his own displeasure apparent in the worried line of his brow, the tension that's carried in his shoulders.

“We are well suited then, in that regard.” Hannibal squeezes Will around the waist once before breaking away and walking to the silver tray. “Indulge me?”

Will shakes his head, walking over to take a seat in the overstuffed leather high back. “This isn't your indulgence, Doctor.”

Will allows him to unbutton and roll up the sleeve of his worn top. He balls his hand into a fist as Hannibal rips the small packages and pulls out a wipe. The prick of the needle's tip in the crook of his arm is little more than a mosquito bite.

“Perhaps you've expanded my palate.”

Will is out before he has the sense to reply.

Chapter End Notes

Squicks note: As will be common with this story, Hannibal is doing all sorts of awful things: stalking Will, intentionally over-serving him, and then drugs him (though Will wants him to). Dubious consent, I tell you.

Chapter 4

Chapter Notes

there's smut. consensual drugging.

It's a different drug this time. It leaves Will in a liminal state that approximates lucid dreaming. He is aware enough of Hannibal maneuvering him up the stairs and onto the floor of another room, can feel something silky soft and plush against his body, but the moments lack agency. He is so removed emotionally from the experience of Hannibal pulling off his clothes, wiping down his naked body with a warm damp cloth, that he's sure he's been more affected by a cereal commercial.

Time plays tricks as well, for he is at once shoved full of a cock that feels too big to have slid in without preamble. It feels good, he supposes, the way warm blankets and tight spaces feel good. The way he is being stuffed is anything but comfortable, yet the pain - and surely, there must be pain - doesn't register beyond a persistent pressure, a burrowing ownership of his body by something that isn't him. He isn't aware enough even to process how he lacks any concern over the way his hole is being worked and stretched, how he should be alarmed that he feels nothing when his body should be wailing with a burning, fiery ache.

He doesn't realize it isn't Hannibal in him because he cannot be bothered to open his eyes. The effort feels monumental, and to what end, really? If he can barely lift his eyelids, what does he expect he can accomplish with the rest of his body? And besides, the tempo by which he is being split, opened up and fucked is soothing the way he imagines infants find comfort in the near deafening pounding of their mother's heartbeat in the womb.

His eyes do flutter open, eventually, when Hannibal's cock is pushed so far down Will's lax throat that his hind brain sparks into action, spurring him to move in order to pull breath beyond the intrusion.

Hannibal is thick, and this suddenly feels familiar in a way that he cannot be bothered to chase down. So this is the first time he might be able to truly appreciate the girth of him as it scrapes along his throat, dipping down far past where he might normally spasm and gag.

Will shifts his head slightly, or imagines he does, because he can suddenly breathe around the cock again. The air rushes through his nostrils, and if Will could process anything more than glimpses of touch and heat and pressure, he might smell blood or musk or something savage because there is no other word for how he is being used by Hannibal right now and *surely* that must have a characteristic odor that will trigger him should he ever come across it again.

He thinks he might black out more fully for a time; the next time he becomes aware of his surroundings, he's been moved into the bathroom, folded over on himself so that his ass is

sticking high in the air, his cheek cold against the tub's smooth bottom.

Hannibal is only a shadow about him, coming in and out of his peripheral vision. He feels a fullness building in his belly, a need to release, but then he is out again until the ice cold spray of water hits the upturned side of his face.

Will sputters, his hands moving a fraction as his body tries to prevent a perceived drowning. There is no accompanying panic though, and if Will had been able to express exactly what he felt at that moment, he wouldn't have used words like terrified or frenzied.

Maybe: useful, indifferent, vaguely satisfied.

He comes to more fully the next time, his head lying on the softest pillow he's ever felt. He's being jostled, erratically, but cannot connect himself to any other feelings assaulting his body. Just the cool, feathery cloud that cushions his head. It suits the way his mind seems to float above and away from his body.

He blinks a few times, finding himself able to, and listens to his throat let out a low, weak moan.

The jostling stops, but somewhere deep inside, Will feels a tickling, scurrying sensation that bring his attention down away from the cloudy feelings of his head and towards the tilt of his body, and the now comfortable pulling about his ass.

Will looks down, but the shapes are too blurry to see anything at first beyond what he knows to be his own body and Hannibal's behind that. Another tickling sensation grips him from deep inside, just above his navel. He groans more loudly when something slides within him.

He blinks again, unbothered. As he regains focus, he sees Hannibal more clearly. He is naked, holding Will folded down over himself with the press of his own body weight. One arm and hand is pushing against the back's of Will's knees. The other one - the other one flexes and balls inside him and quite suddenly he lets out a long, agonizing mewling noise when he connects that Hannibal is forearm deep into his insides.

“You are exquisite, Will,” Hannibal speaks into the back of his thigh. He's looking down, enraptured by their joining, the thick shine of lube that covers his arm from fingers to elbow, runs over Will's hole, across his thighs, along his balls and limp cock.

Will's lips move, he imagines he says Hannibal's name, thinks he hears noise but when it weakly passes his lips, it sounds instead like, “Thank you.”

Hannibal handles Will gently with every move except where he intends to be rough. Later, he is careful to keep the soap out of Will's eyes as he washes his hair, inspects him for potential splits once they're both clean and back in bed. Only then does he take his pleasure, jacking himself off over Will's torso until he comes, thick and hot over his damp smooth chest. It's past two when he finally settles to rest beside Will.

Will isn't beside him when he wakes up. He has enough time to catalogue the dull ache that comes with waking up alone before he smells coffee from downstairs. He makes a mental note to unravel that reaction. Later. For now, he wraps himself in a thin robe and makes his way down the polished stairs.

He finds Will leaning against the counter, glass mug in hand, looking through the wall before him. He's fully dressed again, though Hannibal can smell himself strongly enough from across the room that he knows Will did not wipe himself of his leavings before dressing. Will startles when he hears Hannibal approach. He straightens up. "You want some? Hope it's alright."

Hannibal nods and makes his way to pour himself a cup from the glass carafe on the counter. He takes a sip and smiles appreciatively before moving towards the fridge.

"Can you stay for breakfast?" he asks, pulling out fresh eggs, spinach, wrapped meat.

Will shakes his head, "I really can't."

"Work?"

"Dog."

Hannibal's head tilts in acknowledgment, but doesn't let Will off easily. "Eager to leave?"

Will's nostrils flare, whether in surprise at being called out, or in anger, Hannibal can't quite say. He is at once loose with his expressions and well in control of what gets shown. He thinks back fondly to a few hours ago, when inhibitions had been thoroughly withdrawn and he'd watched Will's shifting emotions when he'd come into consciousness enough to process what was being done to his body. This was a type of control that Hannibal had rarely indulged in. Now that he had, he genuinely wondered why it had taken him this long to consider it.

Will lets out a resolute sigh, but returns to his original casual lean, evidently deciding to stay. "The morning after thing - it's new. I generally don't stick around for chit chat."

"This is a habit of yours," Hannibal states, drawing a bowl down to begin preparing the eggs.

Will rubs at his eyes, suddenly looking more tired than before. "I generally don't stick around to be picked at, either." His tone is more drained than it is sharp, though Hannibal can feel the claws just beneath the words.

"I only seek information to better the experience for both of us." Hannibal barely looks up from his work, whisking the eggs quickly in the bowl.

"You want an evaluation?" Will asks, somewhat aghast. "Is that what you're getting at?"

Hannibal's head shakes once before he clarifies, "Your pleasure - or lack thereof - last night is of little concern to me now. I was satisfied and that was the goal. If we are to continue this

though -”

Will shifts uncomfortably between bare feet. “That’s - that’s not something I do, either. Continue.”

Hannibal pauses to look up at him. “Is it not something you have considered?”

Will brushes his hair away from his face, thinking. He shifts his gaze away from Hannibal to answer. “I have considered it.”

“You wish to avoid the intimacy that would inevitably grow from seeing me again.”

“Seeing someone again? Yes, absolutely. Seeing you again? I said, I’ve considered it.”

The admission pulls a warm smile to Hannibal’s lips and he redirects his focus to their breakfast. They let the silence cover them for a time, Will content to watch Hannibal work. Once their omelettes are finished, Will helps him carry the plates to the dining room.

Hannibal pauses to let Will take a first bite, watching his reaction keenly before cutting into his own. “It would be wise to set some boundaries.” He begins, preparing his next bite delicately onto his fork.

Will stops chewing and looks up at him. He swallows before putting his fork and knife down beside his plate. “And if I don’t want to?” he asks, a defensive edge to his voice that Hannibal notes and takes care not to encourage further.

“Merely to align our expectations. For your safety.” Hannibal elaborates, watching Will watch him. He sees Will’s fingers twitch over the handle of his knife.

“I’ll say again: and if I don’t want to?”

“Do you often place your trust blindly in your bed fellows?” Hannibal asks, curiosity growing.

“I don’t trust you,” Will says plainly, picking up his utensils once more. He takes another bite and chews slowly, considering. “I think you already know that.”

“You either have trust that I will not hurt you once you are incapacitated, or you do not care.” He speaks the alternatives carefully, weighing their meaning.

“This feels awfully picky, Doctor.” Will warns him, but continues nevertheless, “When I'm with someone, it can be easier for me to give up control. It makes it less… blurry that way.”

Hannibal considers the word choice. “Do you find that you often blur?”

Will’s reactive smile is drawn down, sad. “You could say that.”

It’s Hannibal’s turn to put his cutlery down, his attention directed in full to Will. “You don’t trust me. But you trust yourself to know if I would hurt you.”

Will’s face twitches, some microexpression there and gone before Hannibal can truly appreciate it. “It’s harder for me, with you. I suppose there was an element of recklessness on my part, too.”

“And with others?”

“I know what I get myself into,” he states simply, then swallows the last of his coffee.

“Then between us, it would seem that establishing some boundaries explicitly may be all the more important than usual.”

Hannibal moves to refill Will’s cup, but Will stops him with his hand over the glass. He shakes his head, and Hannibal can see that he has pushed too far. “I really should go,” Will says, shoving his chair back against the floor. It makes an unsettling sound that announces he’s scratched his exit into the wood. Not for the first time, Hannibal wishes this was properly his home so that he might keep this token.

Hannibal stands with Will and they make their way to the front door. “I’d like you to call me next time. The number is on my card.”

Hannibal reaches his hand to rest lightly upon the base of Will’s neck. The warmth of his touch elicits a contradictory shiver down Will's back that Hannibal delights in feeling as it passes. Will’s eyes flick to Hannibal’s, once, twice, before finally settling to look steadily at him. “I can’t promise I’ll call.”

“And I cannot promise that I won’t grow impatient before you do.”

The implication floats about them. Hannibal squeezes the tender muscles of Will’s neck before letting go, allowing Will to make the short walk to the main street.

Chapter 5

Will had prepared himself to go into work later that morning, but when the crushing headache came on, he'd called out at the last moment and crawled into the dark of his room. He'd slept for nearly six hours and woke, sticky and sore and blessedly empty.

He’s back at his desk the next day, half-floating and grateful that he needn't dodge too many check-ins about his absence. A perk of staying distant. He keeps his head down and his body tilted away from the steady flow of people past his alcove. Even Thompson - sweet, simple, well-intentioned Thompson - manages to read the room and lets him work in silence for the first half of the morning.

It doesn’t last though: neither the afterglow or the relative peace. By mid-afternoon, they’re called out. The body they find is more gestalt than a whole object. They’ve already been working in the hot, sparsely wooded fields of an equestrian school for hours when the forensics team figures out they’re dealing with an incomplete puzzle. Will and Thompson are recruited to help scour the area for missed remains.

By the time the light has faded so much that they can see fuck all except what’s in their flashlight’s beam, they’ve already spread out nearly a mile in every direction from the epicenter. Will is filthy and exhausted from the heat but they’re still missing a kidney, three toes from the right foot, and a portion of the right upper arm. They bring in flood lamps and stay out another two hours until they finally call it for the night. Will’s not the first to leave the scene, but it’s damn close. Uncharacteristic for him, but he’s having trouble with the buzzing behind his eyes. He’s running out of energy, which means he’s running out of time.

On the short drive home, Will catches himself thinking. Thinking, for Will, can be an exceptionally bad idea. He forces himself to pull over, presumably to collect himself. But within seconds he slips, too easily, back into the animal-worn field. He kneels and feels the hard ground press into his knees through the thin fabric. He's there now, before the pieces were scattered, in the cool shade provided by a lone sweetgum tree.

From what he’d seen, Will knows the cuts had been deliberately sloppy, a skilled pianist pretending to struggle with beginner’s music. There was too much fluidity, stopped too readily, for this to be a true hack job. It’s meant to look ferocious, but the ferocity is orchestrated. He’ll need to prove it, eventually, but he knows. Knowing this makes his spine straighten slightly: it's unbecoming to slouch.

The victim was 27 year old Gemma Donders, 5’6", 130 lbs, blond hair, hazel eyes. He looks down upon her now, in one piece, the knowing terror warping her features and turning her sun-kissed skin a blotchy red as she hiccups back her tears.

In the early morning light, Will smooths her hair down. The movement makes Gemma cry harder, which shoots a pang in his belly that feels a lot like satisfaction. Just for the fuck of it, he combs his fingers through her hair and around, past her ear, along her jaw, finding her

mouth. His fingers push in, and he watches the way she gags and tries to writhe away from his gloved hand. It isn't sexual, only powerful.

This moment, just before he begins, this is his second favourite. The best, of course was… there. He slides the knife in slowly between her ribs and watches her expression transform into surprise and then agony as her breathing falters and she tries with limited success to suck air into her collapsed lung.

The feeling, the connection. The control. It was everything, and only just the beginning. Each time, he feels it a little less fully, but still enough to let him swim in the sensation for hours - days - to come. He closes his eyes, savouring the way one savours the first bite of a crafted meal.

Will shakes with the effort to reorient himself. The A/C in his car is blasting, but he's sweating badly, and unable to catch his breath. *It's a panic attack*, he tries to reassure himself, but the rest of his brain denies logic and demands that, right here, on the side of the road, he is dying. He tries to focus on something outside of his body - something stationary, unchanging, to ground him. It's no use. His face feels burning hot; the edges of his vision blur in the way he welcomes when he's been pouring drink after drink after drink. This isn't that, though. This time, *this* is real. His heart is pounding harder than can be sustained. Soon, it will stutter and seize, and he's going to fucking die.

Yet, under him, under the panic: a lingering, bubbling desire for blood. He wants to taste. The body under him is in carefully torn up pieces, and there's so much of it. A baptism. He knows he won't indulge here, but the ineffable pull to draw his tongue about the body-warmed slick worms past the sense that he's dying so goddamn, he must really fucking want it.

It feels like hours, weeks, but his chest doesn't burst. Eventually, he isn't surrounded by the creeping warmth from the sunrise on the horizon, or the gentle breeze about the open fields. There's no more blood. Only a familiar nagging for violence remains, not the one that had overcome him kneeling over Gemma's parts. The stale smell of car and sweat and forgotten coffee in the cup holder. The burning in his cheeks and the tightness about his neck start to fade. When he notices his goosebumps, he shivers and shuts off the A/C. Takes a steadying breath. Turns off the car completely.

He's back.

Except now, what he wants more than anything, more than not wanting to die, is to disappear. Find some sweet hazy oblivion that doesn't require him to be himself or someone else or anything at all. Even with his glasses, his eyes refuse to focus, though he sees well enough to pick out the sign of the convenience store on the corner. Three minutes later, he's in and out of the store, his car illegally parked and forgotten, his focus entirely on the bottle of Jack and moving somewhere, *anywhere* that isn't right here.

He's halfway through the bottle when he recognizes Charity Hospital looming before him, its wings wrapping around and over him as though in a smothering embrace. Even sober, the 20-story limestone building has always intimidated him. Now, it feels like it's a personal threat. He walks up to the entrance, silently encouraging it to make the first move. He stares dumbly at the art deco bronze-work atop the main entrance. Nothing happens.

Why is he here? What the fuck is he waiting for? He doesn't really understand what he's considering, until it hits him, and then he's so disgusted with himself that he spits out the foul taste that's flooded his mouth. He narrowly misses a stray nurse entering the building, who curses but doesn't break from his purposeful stride.

Hannibal. Somewhere in there, is Hannibal.

Sweat sticks his grey button-up hot against his skin. He takes another long swig, swivels on his heels and walks away, out of Charity's open arms, past the side emergency entrance. Away.

He makes it about a hundred feet when the exhaustion hits him, hard as bricks. He staggers into the unlocked door of a nearby garage and without thinking, starts climbing. He's out of breath, overheating, slightly nauseous when he hits the roof. He stumbles up, then collapses himself in the highest, furthest, most abandoned corner of the garage.

The hospital is everywhere in front of him; if his goal was to get away, he's doing a real bang-up job of it. He stares over at the building, alive despite the late hour. It's absurd, feeling so spiteful towards a building. The man in it. It's overblown, his reaction. He takes another long drink, takes out his cell, and presses the button to connect before he can regret it.

Immediately, a pre-recorded message on the other end starts up. He hates it, but it makes him feel calmer to hear Hannibal's voice:

"This is Dr. Hannibal Lecter. You have reached me when I am away from my phone. If this is an emergency…" Will listens to the message, easily bringing to mind the curve of Hannibal's lips as his mouth forms about the syllables. The beep nearly makes him jump.

"Hannibal," he says, resisting the urge to clear his throat or give away any sign that he might be nervous or drunk or both. "Call me at this number." He hangs up, lays himself down on the cooling concrete, and closes his eyes.

It's nearly 20 minutes later when his phones buzzes with the call.

"Hannibal," he answers, not bothering to look at the ID.

"Will." Hannibal pauses. He can hear the controlled chaos of the hospital in the background. "I'm afraid I am not able to talk long, but the way you sounded -"

Will grimaces. He doesn't want Hannibal's sympathy. Fucked if he knows why he's calling at all, but it's not for that. He ignores Hannibal's unanswered question of concern. "When are you off?"

“Not for another few hours.”

“Come when you’re done.” Will doesn’t wait for a reply. He closes his eyes against the sight of the hospital before him, the ER only a few stories down, Hannibal within it. He doesn’t intend it, but he’s out within a minute.

The sky is only barely clinging to the remnant night when he wakes with a start. As he pulls himself up off the concrete, his head spins, then begins a fierce throbbing. The bottle of Jack has tipped and is now mostly empty, but he tilts the last of it down his throat before he begins a doddering climb down to find a cab.

It isn’t that Will doesn’t remember calling Hannibal, only that he’d hoped it was early enough that he wouldn’t find him waiting on the front porch when the cab pulls up to his home. He’d only needed a 10 minute head-start: enough to get in, lock up, shower down, and then diligently ignore any now-unwelcome knocks at his door.

Hannibal doesn’t smile at him from the porch, but it’s a near thing. He looks energized. More than that: like he’s caught the scent of prey on the wind and his blood is growing thick with testosterone and cortisol. He is alert, clean, not the least bit dirtied or burnt. Will imagines he looks like the man’s polar opposite.

For a long while, Will stares at him through the window. When Hannibal makes a move to stand, he decides: “Keep driving,” he says, and turns to look straight ahead.

He showers at the station, changes into a spare shirt, and is four cups of coffee in and mostly sober by the time Thompson comes in.

“Jesus fuck, you ok?” she says, dropping her backpack blindly at she takes in her partner’s still-ragged appearance.

Will considers lying, but what’s the use of it with her? He pulls his glasses off and sets them down among his files and momentarily puts his head down in his hands.

“Rough night,” he offers finally. A small wave of relief washes over him when he glances up to see that she looks only marginally better than he feels.

She slumps down in her chair, and she nods once in acknowledgment. Thompson’s focus is redirected to the small silver ring she wears on her right hand; she spins it absently as she talks. “Every dream I had - she was there. I just… I kept finding more pieces.”

Not all of them, he thinks, but keeps quiet. They won't confirm it until later that afternoon, but they'll remain a kidney and a bicep short. The memory of blood and its inviting metallic stench overcomes him momentarily. It's gone before he begins to wonder if he might fall in, again. Still, his mouth waters.

After a requisite respectful silence for the dead, he takes a folder off his desk. "Ready?" he asks, offering it to Thompson. She accepts it, silently. They get to work.

Chapter 6

Chapter Notes

Please see new tags and notes at the end for TW.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

He spends most of the next four days at his desk, apart from short breaks for walks with Zoe and restless snatches of time tangled in his bed sheets. Combining all the nights together, he doesn't think he's slept a full eight hours, and so he tries not to think of it at all.

The work is good, if unsatisfying. They're re-assigned as support on the Donders case after Will links the murder with another previously-known-as John Doe who turns out to be her business partner. Superficially, the methods are night and day: one a floater found bobbing after a day swept down the Mississippi, versus Donders' sun-soaked tetris pieces. But both are missing pieces - him, his lower left leg - and with their relationship, it's enough to officially combine the cases under a more senior detective's supervision.

Will's yet to be called to support - likely won't be, knowing the detective. So strictly speaking, he shouldn't be spending his nights and early mornings pouring over the close-up photographs of the woman's severed parts and comparing it to the surgically-precise amputation on the bloated corpse. It's above his expertise, anyway: he hasn't been in homicide long enough to be carrying what will undoubtedly turn into a shit show of a case, even with Thompson's help. But the rest of his load - fatal domestic disturbances or muggings turned sideways - leave him with a lot of time to think about how glorious Donders' insides had looked in the early morning light. Sometimes, when things are really slow, or when he finally gives up and heads home, he can't seem to help himself.

It isn't that he's trying to distract himself, necessarily. There are more satisfying distractions, surely. Less dangerous ways to turn off his mind. Though then again, perhaps his usual coping mechanisms are what he really needs distracting from.

After his personal phone died following his impromptu nap on the garage roof, he doesn't bother to charge it again. Two days later, when he catches sight of Hannibal waiting in his BMW halfway down the street, he detours three blocks in the opposite direction to try a new coffee shop.

"Graham, if you don't go home soon I'm making sure Moreau knows you're working harder on his case than he is." Thompson emphasizes her point by tilting her head towards the detective's empty desk.

Will huffs at the threat, but is mildly surprised to see it's already late. He closes his folder and leans back in his chair. His arms stretch above his head, and he listens to the small bubbles

crackle up his spine.

“You know Moreau isn’t going to manage fuck all with this.”

Thompson smiles, but it’s more like a sort of sympathetic twist of her lips than anything pleasant. She’s been giving Will that look a lot, lately.

“I know. And it’s shit. But you’re asking for trouble the longer you keep looking at this. He’s… possessive of his cases.” She swivels in her chair so she can lean over and rest her hand on Will’s knee. “Seriously, Graham. Go home. Relax.”

Will manages not to flinch away from the touch, choosing instead to shift casually in his chair and then stand, which just as effectively removes his leg from her tangible concern. He shoves his hands in his pocket, as though in demonstration.

His eyes flicker between Thompson and the folder before he decides: “Alright, Thompson, alright.”

She smiles, a sparkling view of bright white framed by her deeply pigmented lips. “A few of us are grabbing a drink soon - don’t suppose I could persuade you to come?” Her eyebrows raise in misplaced hope.

Will laughs quietly to himself, picks his bag up from beside his desk and shakes his head slightly. “Thanks anyway.” He takes one last look at his files, then grabs them to put in his bag and heads out before she can argue.

He’s off the next day, which is troubling at the best of times but he feels more unmoored than usual. The morning is spent cleaning, fixing random shit around the house, starting and then abandoning nearly a dozen small jobs. By mid-afternoon, he’s out of odd tasks and feels more unsettled.

He takes Zoe out for a walk. He spends nearly an hour literally putting more and more distance between himself and the files in his bag before he forces himself to head back.

As he comes out of the park by his home, he spots Hannibal driving away. He isn’t trying to blend in: he wants to be seen. Will refuses to give him the satisfaction of thinking any more about what that means. Which only makes him think about Donders. It’s another hour of avoiding one thought by bringing to mind the other. He still doesn't open the file.

He tries to make a decent dinner, but loses motivation and abandons the pilaf half-cooked on the stove. He takes a bottle, a clean glass, and settles himself in the backyard.

The night is still warm, the air thick with the humidity so his lungs have to pull just that much harder. Will starts to sweat nearly immediately, but it’s a familiar sort of sticky and finally, after a quick emptying of his glass, he relaxes into it.

Will shifts, digging his hand into his back pocket. He throws his wallet down on the table beside his drink, but keeps his pocket knife. Oak and steel, wood worn smooth from years of nervous turning over again and again in his pocket. He flicks the blade open, the porch light catching the blade to glint bright white. He keeps it sharp; it's a simple thing to imagine it sliding in between Donders' ribs, into her lung.

He sees how the frothy bright red would gurgle from the wound and practically float over the blade's edge. In his mind's eye, a hyper-reality forms: the bubbles are caught in the light morning breeze, and all around him is translucent red.

His vision tunnels in on the knife's edge, which his holds just above the skin of his forearm. How easily the blade would part the tight skin. What release might he find when the blood wells up and over the clean edges of future scars? Below, he takes in the long faded, shimmering latticework of past wounds. It had been a relief before, he remembers with a sort of sickening nostalgia. Before he'd traded one bad habit for another.

The point of the blade dances just below the crook of his elbow. "You were not the point," he whispers to himself, but wishes Gemma could hear him. He shakes his head, tries to clear it of the swirling haze of red. "No, you didn't really matter. But what the fuck did?"

He sucks in the weighty air, pulls the inside of his cheek between his teeth. He worries the flesh between his molars until he tastes the tangy promise of blood. He digs the knife's point in, just for a second, but then finds the control to drag the blade frustratingly lightly over his arm, leaving only the suggestion of a scratch.

He folds up the knife and throws it blindly into the wildflowers.

From her spot near the back of the yard, Zoe's head lifts towards Will and she whines.

The screen door opens and Will turns. From inside his home, Hannibal steps out.

What Will feels isn't surprise, exactly. What else might the casual stalking been leading to, anyway? Perhaps a nagging absence of surprise is itself somewhat alarming. He watches Hannibal's stillness, if only for a moment. Then, he watches as he slowly moves. Nearly predatory. It's a straight shot between them, and Hannibal closes the distance directly, but he gives the impression that Will is being circled.

Hannibal sinks into the empty chair beside him. With one hand, he reaches out to clasp Will's arm by the wrist, examining the already fading pink line that runs the length of his smooth forearm. His other hand moves to pull Will's elbow over, and then suddenly, his head ducks and the only thing Will feels is Hannibal's tongue sliding hot and wet over where he didn't cut. Immediately, he regrets that Hannibal's mouth won't come up obscene, painted slick and red.

A breath shudders out of Will's lungs that he isn't aware he was holding. Hannibal's grip tightens about Will's arm, though Will has no intention of pulling away. When Hannibal's tongue lifts off his skin, Will continues to feel the sensation slide up up up, straight up his arm until it splits and tingles up his neck to settle, prickly and overwhelming at the base of his skull.

Hannibal repeats the motion, this time introducing teeth against his flesh, his bite intentionally gentle and teasing. The way it tugs Will, his lips sucking about the flesh feels invasive and absolutely right. "*Yes*," he whispers, eyes locked on the sight before him.

When Hannibal lifts his head, Will sees what he wants: his blood crushed and smothered over Hannibal's lips and chin. He flashes to the field, the emerging light upon Gemma's body, imagines what it might be like to sink his teeth deep into the exposed muscles of her severed arm. Eyes locked on Hannibal, his tongue wets the edges of his dry lips.

"Hurt me," he whispers, unable to look away. His vision clears, Hannibal returning before him as perfectly groomed and clean as usual, and his gut lurches with disappointment.

But he can change that. "Hurt me," he says again, this time more demanding. The edge of Hannibal's lips quirk up.

The first aid kit that Will passes to him is battered and clearly expired; the antiseptic is stamped with a date nearly three years past. The suture needle and thread remain unopened, at least. He scrubs his hands clean at the sink as Will finishes in the shower.

Hannibal raises his voice above the noise of the water, "Don't towel off your chest." He leans against the ceramic sink to wait, unselfconscious of his nakedness or the mess that remains beyond his hands. His tongue itches, wanting for a taste that he has denied himself. He isn't as reckless as Will, but that doesn't mean he doesn't want it as badly. His body virtually vibrates with the urge to drink.

The shower stops. Will dries his dripping curls and then wraps the towel about his waist. The cut in need of attention, running from above his left nipple nearly clean across to the other, has begun to fill and drip again now that the water is no longer washing the blood away. Hannibal swallows hard, then works his hands slowly into the old latex of the kit's gloves.

"This is unnecessary." Will repeats himself. Hannibal knows it: he has spent more than just this evening admiring the sheen of white scars that lace here and there about Will's body. These, too, would scar beautifully if he ignored them. Perhaps, the big one might heal puffy and raw, a deep pink amidst the other more shallow marks.

But the allure of ripping Will open, only to neatly stitch him back up is too overwhelming. He tuts once at Will to silence him before he rips open the package of needle and thread.

The skin of Will's chest is firm in a way that he appreciates all the more now that he spends so much time tending to those who are much less careful with their bodies. He is himself strict about his diet, his activities... but even so, as he runs a gloves hand over the taut skin, he feels the difference in years between himself and the body before him.

Will stays perfectly still for the first suture, which prompts Hannibal to purposely dig unnecessarily deeper with the next. That garners a sharp inhale, and he pushes his chest forward into the needle. Insatiable. Beautiful.

Hannibal knows he could rest the needle on the counter, grab either side of the gash on his chest and *pull* at its edges. But that Will wants his violence gives him enough resolve to continue with his sutures. When he's done, he moves on to place two butterfly closures on a shallower cut closer to Will's sternum.

"You were expecting me," he states, running his gloved hand over the rest of his chest, littered with less substantial knicks and divots.

Will gnaws the edge of his lips between his teeth before he answers. "I hadn't been myself when I called. It was a bad idea."

"You've been keeping busy. Do you typically throw yourself into your work when you have bad ideas?" Hannibal notices the way Will flinches away from his confident touch, then watches, enraptured as the muscles in his chest consciously relax.

"Normally, work is where I pick up the bad ideas."

"And when you make them on your own?"

Will regards him disdainfully, then shifts so that he may slip out of Hannibal's reach. In the bedroom, he begins to dress in boxers and an undershirt. Armor. He avoids looking at Hannibal, directing his attention instead towards the damp towel gripped in his hands. It's a good show at looking shy. Hannibal watches, enamored by the way his shoulders slope as he considers the loops of the towel.

Hannibal has practiced his patience; even so, it feels like an impossible time before Will finally speaks. "If I had told you to leave? Just now. Or on the porch?"

The answer comes to Hannibal's lips quickly because its certainty echoes within him: "I would have stayed."

Will swallows and nods, and he thinks it's a nod to himself rather than in response to Hannibal's words. He briefly shuts his eyes; his body sways slightly.

He's watching Will carefully, or else he might have missed the switch: the slight straightening of his spine, or the way his toes dig into the pile of the rug as though to seek something solid to steady him. He looks virtually identical as before, but Hannibal has a sense that with the quick shift, he is standing before a new puzzle.

"And now?" he asks, prowling once more towards Hannibal. His movements about the space are more intentional, bordering on territorial. Any feigned insecurity is gone.

The times they have had, the times he has had Will, they have developed in him a craving. Not, conveniently, for more of the same. No more pliant, time-slipping, endlessly accommodating Will. Not right now at least. What he craves is the thing beneath, that which

Will is so eager to sedate. With the shift, there is a suggestion of it before him, for once within arms reach. He wants to indulge it, not dope it out of him. He wants to be the one to twist and sweat and suck it from him, until Will either submits entirely, without the drugs, or rages before him in all his glory.

“And now, are you going to leave?” he asks again. Will's voice is hard, the energy around him bristling.

Hannibal reaches out two gloved fingers to land softly on Will’s lower lip. Will inhales sharply before taking the pads of the digits greedily into his mouth. Hannibal pushes them in deeper to encourage him, listens to the soft crinkle of the latex as his fingers flex.

Will moans, a reserved, cut-off noise. He curls his fingers inside the wet heat of Will’s mouth, and sharply pulls at his lower jaw to bring his face a breath away from his own.

“I’m afraid you’ve caught me,” Hannibal says, before leaning in to replace his fingers with his mouth.

Chapter End Notes

TW for referenced self-harm (cutting) and self-harm by proxy, blood and mild medical kink.
It should be made abundantly clear that writing this is in no way an endorsement of the activities depicted herein.

Chapter 7

Chapter Notes

TWs at the end

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It's still deep dark outside when Hannibal slips from the bed. Will breathes heavily when the mattress adjusts; he feels a genuine burst of affection for the man who feigns rest below him, which slides easily into a greedy sort of need. He wants to reach out, touch the sinewy lines along Will's back, but that would ruin the illusion. Instead, he makes a point of exaggerating the care by which he leaves the bedroom, sucks in a harsher breath than necessary when Zoe's paws click noisily on the hardwood when she comes to investigate. He leaves the door ajar so that Will might slip out of it more quietly. He doesn't trust him, he says.

Once in the kitchen, he pours himself a glass of water, then begins taking inventory of the home's contents. The fridge is nearly as empty as it had been on his previous visit. There are several new books strewn upon the kitchen table, mostly relating to equestrian training, another a monograph about internal organ decay in brackish water.

He notices Will's satchel on the chair, dropped half open. The name "DONDERS, G" is visible on the tab of one folder. A glossy 8x10 is jammed awkwardly so that he can see a slim ankle and bare foot in beaten-down grass.

He has spent years training his body to react the way he prefers it. His heart stays steady; he'd wager his pupils don't even dilate. Carefully, he reaches out to close the flap over the files. He moves on to examine the spines of the books upon the shelves.

It's only minutes before Will slips out, as silently as Hannibal had expected. He's pleasantly surprised when he registers his presence only a half second before Will's hands move to grip the half-exposed jut of his hip bones. His only giveaway: the faint smell of blood and low-boiling arousal Hannibal hadn't trusted himself with earlier.

Hannibal allows himself to be pulled into the warm body behind him, his hips shifting to play at surprise at feeling Will's hard cock rub against his ass.

"What's here that you didn't see before?" He asks, voice rough with want rather than derision. He ruts roughly enough behind him that Hannibal puts an arm out on the bookshelf to provide sufficient push-back.

Hannibal hums, as though he must consider the question. As he does, Will's fingers move to cover his cock through his briefs, cupping his balls and rolling them in his fingers a hint too roughly. Hannibal starts to harden.

"You've brought your work home with you." He leans his head back to catch a glimpse of Will behind him. He looks feral, pupils blown, nostrils flared. Rapacious.

Will huffs, then leans his head hard against Hannibal's shoulder. "It goes with me no matter."

"Do others' ghosts haunt you, Will?" His curiosity tickles at him; it is something more than stress and an overactive imagination, that much is obvious.

Will leans in and *bites* the relaxed muscles of his deltoid, as though in frustration. "A haunting is too ethereal for what gets into my mind."

He appreciates the honesty, and shows it by pressing his ass harder against Will's cock, then rocking so the fabric between them catches and rubs roughly along his length. Will makes a noise that borders on a purr, then digs his fingers into his hips. He is whipped around, pushed back hard into the shelving, which creak and rattle their complaints. Will's hand slides up his torso, briefly tangling in his chest hair, before clamping expertly on either edge of his windpipe. The effect is immediate, the pressure against his arteries draw out a buzzing tingle from the base of his skull. When he doesn't resist the pressure, Will crushes harder, his face transformed by awe. *Let it come*, he thinks. Will moans loudly, guiltily, then pulls Hannibal in for a gasping kiss.

He splits them apart only enough to breathe; Hannibal watches him being watched. Examined. Pondered. "You don't get in here at all," Will says, an edge of wonder softening his words. It's not the first time he's said as much. He doesn't understand, not completely. But enough.

"The destruction before me is entirely your own," he says roughly from behind Will's grasp. "Let me undo you. Let me bear witness to what is underneath."

Will's grip tightens sharply about his neck before he lets go completely, shoving Hannibal hard against the shelves to distance himself from the man. Will's features crumple and realign so quickly, he finds himself delighted at the challenge of keeping up. The play of guilt across Will's face works to stoke the embers of his possessiveness. How beautiful, this exquisite suffering before him.

Hannibal pulls his cock out of his briefs, then pushes them down and off completely. Will maintains the space between them, his body poised either to flee or ravage, but his eyes dart hungrily down.

"*Come*."

It is undeniably a demand. There is a moment of hesitation, before he watches Will buckle before him. He hobbles the short distance between them and fills his mouth with Hannibal, first greedily sucking on his balls, and then shoving his cock down his throat violently enough to make himself gag. Hannibal feels devoured.

Yes, show me.

He grips his hand tightly into Will's hair, pulling hard enough to resist his urgent need to take him to the hilt. Will makes a frustrated groan and in retaliation, he wraps his arms around him to grip forcefully at his ass and pull him in. The length that pushes deep into Will's throat makes his body convulse. His cock twitches hearing the choking, gasping noise he lets out. Every counter move Will makes causes the pleasure to grow exponentially.

He wants to tug the violent, needy thing beneath him out of its shadows. He shoves himself upon Will's face, encouraging the ruined noises. He keeps his hand wrapped mercilessly in his tangles, and guides his mouth to suck and slurp at his cock.

Will makes a loud, wanton noise, then sags visibly into him. He still has an edge of wildness punctuating his harried breaths. But kneeling and stuffed with Hannibal's cock, he is also newly blissful and resolute at his mistreatment.

No. *No.* This won't do at all.

He doesn't want Will to escape into the comfort of his submissiveness, not like he forces with the drugs. He places both palms on Will's shoulders and shoves him off. Will loses balance and scrambles back on his hands. He stares up at Hannibal, confused at first, but then seemingly delighted by the show of force. *No*, he thinks, *this isn't working.*

Hannibal lets out a noise that borders on a growl, then moves to press his bare foot hard against Will's chest. The pressure against his raw cuts makes Will hiss and collapse onto the floor. He may be laid supine now, but Hannibal can practically see the way his violence is bubbling within him. Locked up, terrified of its power. *There, yes.*

"Let me see you, Will."

He demands, but Will doesn't move beyond an intake of breath. In response, he grinds his foot directly over the sutured wound. Testing. Taunting. *Come out,*he wants to roar. He feels Will's chest push up into the pressure in his own teasing escalation.

They stay frozen in place, each daring the other to bend. A bead of blood escapes and begins to weep lazily down Will's chest. His stomach actually growls at the sight.

Fine, he nearly huffs out loud like a spoiled child. If Will wants to be used, then Hannibal will appease him.

He draws his eyes away from Will's chest and stares at the tent of his boxers, the opening pulled wide by his arousal. He drags his foot down Will's chest until he can rub his heel along its length, softly, and then with greater force. Sensing a victory, Will moans and bucks up; his head falls back against the sensation.

He wraps his hand over his cock and feels himself pulse. The look of Will below him, panting, bloody: it's intoxicating. Irresistible. *Fine.*

For weeks, he has imagined his beauty, ripped carnal from his breast. He would be delicious, he's sure of it. If Will won't defend himself, then he won't resist the blood lust that colours everything crimson. So be it.

Except. When he brings the familiar fantasy to mind now - a tease before the indulgence - the image flickers and dissolves. It's no longer Will as the victim; but some faceless other. For his own role, he has been displaced to the side, to watch the predator within Will prowl about the prey. *Oh.*

He conjures up Will's mannerisms and lets the fantasy run wild as Will wantonly ruts against his foot. In his mind, he details the way Will would do it, how he would break open the other's ribs to get at the treasures within. It is so unlike how Hannibal is teaching himself to act; Will could fall completely into the savagery of the act. If he could bring it to pass, it might be like witnessing a miracle of human connection, as Will rips the life away from another.

The new image makes him consider, and he tilts his head in its outward display. It's not to be denied: he craves the heady flavour of his heart. But yet he has shown unusual resistance to finishing things with Will. Would it, perhaps, be more satisfying to tease and pull out what Will tries so hard to bury deep within?

Will mimics the movement of his head, raising his eyebrows as if to ask, *Yes?* It's no use tonight. He isn't ready to let him go. He can lure whatever is inside of the other man, eventually. He is patient.

Will it be worth it, to learn the taste of self actualization?

And so, he is no meal to him, not yet. A toy. A wonderfully complex, self-loathing thing who is writhing beneath his heel. Fine, *let's play*.

He flexes the muscles of his ass to feel the fluttery wave ascend his insides. "Do you top?"

Will lets out of groan in response, and nods. "You want me to fuck you?"

Hannibal smirks at the obscenity. He closes his eyes for a moment, searing the splay of Will's body laid out on the wood floor into his memory. He'll draw him. Tomorrow. His beginning.

He shakes his head and corrects him. "I have little interest in being fucked; I will do that myself. A toy would be as convenient, if you don't think you can satisfy."

Will's cock jerks so sharply that the tip slides out to poke through his boxers and tap on the side of Hannibal's foot. He narrows his eyes. "Can you be serviceable to me conscious, Will?"

Will crawls back some, enough so that Hannibal's toes brush against his inner thigh. He keeps his gaze on him as he moves his hands down and squirms out of his boxers. His cock stands thick and hard from his stomach. In the dim light that slits through the curtains, Hannibal admires the growing shine of wetness about its head. In invitation, Will butterflies his legs down.

For a fleeting moment, he wants to wriggle his toes higher, press Will's sack firmly under his foot and *twist*, hear how he might mew without drink or drugs or blood. Even though he has

failed for now to lure the darkness out, there is no doubt that this too is Will, laid open for him.

He lowers himself onto his knees, between Will's legs. He spits once, then again onto Will's shaft, and works the saliva to mix with his slick. The sound of the boy's gasp makes his skin grow fiery.

He crawls over Will's form, slim and toned and bare. His hand unwinds from his cock so that he might swipe at the sticky trail of blood that is slowly drying down his ribcage.

Will goes still, opens his mouth and swallows. Hannibal waits him out.

"I'm negative. You should - you should taste me."

It is the way his voice stuttered at the words. Not the feigned sort of shyness that he thinks some of Will's other partners might have craved in the depraved man below him. No, this sounds as though he is inviting a vampire in, and he knows it. Trepidation. But not nearly enough.

He brings his reddened finger to his lips and sucks, hard. Under the coppery tang there is whiskey and blackberries and secrets. There is a sort of feverish sweetness that could overwhelm the senses in volume. His tongue rubs along his mouth, over the ridges of his hard palate, across the smooth backs of his teeth. Will's taste coats his tongue.

Will's smile beneath him is satisfied, if cautious. He sees something that Hannibal rarely lets out before others. He shows it to Will because, he thinks, they may be the same. Maybe not like *that*, but somehow.

Hannibal's hips shift, rub himself up, over, past Will's cock until it presses against his hole. His right hand splays over Will's chest, nails digging against newly scabbed lines to let the red up and out again. With his left, he grips Will firmly and positions him so that he can work himself open on his barely slick length.

He savours how he splits on Will, goes slowly first to avoid bypassing the pleasant burn with anything more intense, and then later because it makes Will squirm below him in the most delicious way. For his part, Will tries to stay immobile, as much as he seems able, to provide for him whatever he so pleases. It makes his chest tight, his stomach plunge and wobble to witness how *good* Will wants to be.

"Did you do this?" Will asks breathlessly. "Before?"

The thought of arranging Will, unconscious and pliant so that he might fuck himself on him makes him groan. He'd have to stuff that cock full to hardness, a creativity he hadn't considered yet. He feels just nearly relaxed enough, and pushes himself forcefully down the rest of his length, grinds hard against the jutting bones beneath.

"You present yourself nearly too tempting an offering." His words are short, more affected than he'd expected. The slight friction of his too-dry cock inside his ass demands his attention the way so few things can. His hips shift and tilt.

Will laughs at that, head thrown back, exposing his throat in a way that feels entirely unaware. Hannibal's hand digs in harshly against the slices along Will's chest, and he rubs at them to turn his palm a dirty red. He brings it to his tongue, which he runs flat and hot from wrist to fingertip, tasting Will. It's not enough.

It's not going to be enough.

Will whines at the show, bucks up before he can stop himself, then plays again at being as still as possible. Hannibal notices the way his fingernails dig into the meat of his hand in concentration. Something prideful bursts in his chest at the sight and he bounces on Will's cock more deliberately: faster, harder.

They stay like this a while, Will growing less reposed, Hannibal growing wilder the longer he uses Will to fuck upon. The stench of blood in the air is dizzying; soon it is everything he can think of.

He stops, quite suddenly, when there's nothing left to it. Will groans, tries to grind up against him but he is buried full hilt into Hannibal already. "Shh, boy, stay still," he murmurs, and traces one finger delicately about the sutured wound that is now puffed and leaking weakly in several places.

Hannibal leans down then, taking a suture between his sharp teeth and gnaws. The thread comes apart in his mouth easily enough, and so he does it again and again and again. Below him, Will is making nearly soundless cries, of pain or ecstasy, he doesn't care.

He just needs to taste.

And so it is, when he fucks down hard onto Will's cock, that the last suture is released into his mouth and he spits it out, then bites, *bites* hard against the ruined edges of Will's deepest cut to pull whines and blood alike from the body below.

Hannibal feels the spasm of Will's cock inside him, the light tingle of his come as he pulses into his ass. He renders his appreciation for the sensation by inserting his tongue deep into the thickest part of the wound, and begins to lap greedily at the blood as it flows. This time, Will screams.

He feels Will's hand, shaky and weak, but it doesn't push him away; insteas, he begins to pump it over his cock. It's a distant accompaniment to the bliss he has found for himself. Just below his tongue, he can feel the rabbiting of Will's heart; he can imagine away the muscle, the ribs, the lungs and pretend he is running his tongue roughly against the pericardium. So *close*.

He slides himself along Will still, long after he whimpers and deflates below him, as if he were trying to sink away from the searing burn that must overwhelm him. Will is shaking, sweat puddling in the indents of his clavicles. Still, he never once tries to move him off.

Hannibal doesn't care what it's like for him, not really. He is too focused on the way his tongue can feel the differentiation between the skin and the adipose and the smooth, subtle

striation of the muscle. It'll scar, undoubtedly. The inflamed edges will pull together again in an uneven reddened memory of Hannibal.

Hannibal bucks and shifts his hips without conscious thought now, rubbing Will against him until he feels about to burst, until Will slips half-hard and slick from his hole and can't easily be manipulated back in. From there, he fucks into the welcome hollow of Will's grip around his cock, practically forces Will to stay steady as he uses him until he erupts over the tight, twitching muscles of their stomachs. In the immediate come down, Hannibal nuzzles his face against Will's blood-soaked chest in a manner that would be sweet if his intention weren't so intemperate.

He lays collapsed on top of Will just long enough to slow his breathing, then moves swiftly up. He can feel the cold slide of come as it drips down his inner thighs, notices with some satisfaction how Will glues his eyes to its lazy course over his skin. He offers his hand, which Will grips and uses to clamour up from the hard floor, wincing now that endorphins have burned off and all that's left for him is pain.

Despite it, he smiles, a lazy fucked out grin. "Was I serviceable?"

He draws Will in close, uncaring of the way his chest hair mats and tickles the pucker of his wounds. He wraps his arms around Will's waist like bondage, not for any lingering post-coital affection but because he *has*to. The idea of letting Will go again feels absolutely wrong.

Chapter End Notes

TWs: Nothing particularly new for the pair, but more blood and pain than usual. This time, Will is conscious.

Chapter 8

Chapter Notes

warnings at the end, tags and pairings updated. thanks for all the lovely comments so far, it's very much appreciated!

will's pov for this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will wakes in an empty bed. His hand stretches across his body, memories prickling up as his fingers find the edges of new bandages covering ruined skin.

There's a pang of disappointment when he gets up to find Hannibal gone. It must linger for a time because when he comes across his cell, he immediately plugs it in to charge. A few moments later, it buzzes.

Multiple missed calls from Hannibal over the past four days, but only one text from earlier this morning:

My apologies, I've been called in to work.

A rush of warmth spreads through Will, until it rises to the back of his throat where it takes on a bitter flavor. The phone spins and tumbles within his hand, skittering across his fingers.

He tosses it back onto the table and goes to let Zoe in.

In time, he stops his aimless pacing about the living room. The air feels ionized as he breathes it in deeply. Again. Finally, he sits with his overheated coffee and focuses past the old paint on the walls. He feels a bit like a live wire, stripped and raw. In need of repair.

He closes his eyes. By degrees, he replaces the black with color until in his mind, it is late afternoon, hazy and warm around the edges.

Like that, he faces the stream.

He's built up this respite over years now, its details stored across a dozen memories. Those synapses have fired together so often though that his visits no longer just feel familiar; they are tainted with a disorienting deja vu.

It's not helpful to dwell on how his trusted escapisms are starting to fail him, one by the one. He focuses instead on the imagined sensations of the scene.

On the bank, he can bury his toes into the gritty mud and feel the cold of the river tickle the tops of his feet. The water takes on a hasty, purposeful speed. He watches rogue leaves and branches travel past. Here, it is always nearly autumn, or what he imagines it could look like further north.

For a time, it is peaceful.

When the cleanly severed lower leg sweeps by, he swallows the initial indignity of such a violation into his mind's haven. He can take its intrusion in stride, let it slide out of view and re-imagine his space as though it were never here. Instead, the view quivers with his heartbeat and behind his belly button he feels a nauseating *lurching* that pulls him out. Then he's knee-deep in the water, the swollen leg already growing heavy in his hands. A single bite mark comes into view as he rotates the limb; it is wine-stained and still seeping a diluted red, in spite of the surrounding decay.

Quiver, shatter, *blink,* then his mouth is over the mark. Nearly a perfect match. The taste is rotten and cold; the muscle slimy against his tongue. His teeth sink deeper in. Underneath, the pebbles below his toes shift and grate against each other. Precarious.

When he pulls the leg away, it is not a leg at all, but Donder's arm, before the muscle had been cut out. Another mark, his own doing this time, this time savage and primal. His mouth waters.

He licks his lips.

And he is back. The coffee is no longer steaming. Zoe dozes comfortably below, her paw overtop his foot. There's bile burning the bottom of his throat.

Except: he's famished.

He doesn't see Hannibal later that day. Or the next. Or the next. Hannibal doesn't message him again, which is good because Will would agree to just about anything if asked of it now. He replays the evening over and over until it is half-fantasy, half-fact. His is a building urge that's starting to nag at him with a suggestion of becoming an uncontrollable need.

But he doesn't call, either. Just keeps his phone charged and develops a compulsion to check it every time he switches tasks.

He spends a week like this, until even Thompson is getting sick of his bullshit and she, in her perpetually polite way, tells him to fuck off and take care of whatever is bothering him.

He thinks, *Is this was affection feels like? This cloying, relentless thing?*

Will looks out for him, once in a while at the start, and then with increasing urgency as days go on. But Hannibal is exactly nowhere. He starts taking Zoe on more easterly walks, until he is unabashedly scoping out Hannibal's neighborhood, circling a black hole whose singularity

has built-in curio cabinets, and smooth concrete counters, and the softest bedding he's ever laid in.

Still, there is no one. *It's better this way, anyway* , he thinks, but feels increasingly incensed.

Later that week, after another 14 hours on, Will empties the bottle of Jameson too quickly and finds himself in a predicament: stay home with his own thoughts, or move.

He grabs his wallet and then he's walking away, away, away, telling himself he'll just get a couple more drinks and then get back to bed.

But Hannibal's memories itch all over his chest.

He thinks maybe, he'd rather get lost in someone else than be alone with his mind a moment longer. He slides into the next hole he sees, switches to beer to keep pace, and settles at the bar to wait.

The red-head is handsy even before they're out of the shithole bar where both of them looked about 20 years out of place. He's drunk, but not yet undone: loose and uninhibited and frankly, a bit impatient. It's not just his own desire that makes his cheeks warm, a violent sort of anticipation radiates off the red-head. The growling dominance of the man licks at the edges of his mind, making him want to take and be used in turn.

He's being sloppy. Except: he doesn't fucking care.

They make it less than a dozen steps before Will's shoved against the wall just inside the entrance to the alley. As he's flipped around, his head smashes against the brickwork. The guy smiles at this; Will returns the expression sardonically. He fumbles uncooperative fingers over the buttons of red-head's pants; it takes only the slightest push from the man to bring Will down to his knees.

"What a thirsty whore," red-head says and lets out a satisfied snigger.

Will wastes no time, practically taunting a dopaminergic buzz to make him feel less himself as he takes the man into his mouth. Red-head tastes sour and sweaty and his prick is *all wrong.* But Will is determined to let himself shift, he relishes in the way his own feelings dull and fade, replaced in time with what he elicits in the man.

Soon, his muffled moans come out as predictions of the other's reactions, and their movements begin to resonate with one another. He can feel the way the guy wants his grip in Will's hair to tighten, how he's holding back from forcing Will to bob before him faster, *faster.* The synchronicity itself drives Will's pleasure, coupled with the suggestion of more vicious inclinations. He's filled out and aching, but it's better not to pay attention to that. Will holds himself open, cheeks hollow, and welcomes the blurring of their needs.

Before events get too uncontrolled, Will comes back to himself enough to pull off and wipe the trail of spit off his chin. He staggers up, undoes his pants and assumes a frisk position against the wall. The red-head groans something obscene and crowds over him. He's about to press in when Will snaps up straight.

"Use a fucking condom," he growls, shooting the man a disgusted look. He pulls up his pants enough to find his wallet, and shoves a small packet into the man's hand.

He half expects a protest, but the guy only chuckles to himself, rips open the foil and in a breath he's sheathed and fucking in a little deeper with every short, ragged thrust. There's no preamble or getting used to the burn, and Will's grateful for it. It makes the man feel powerful, which in turn makes his own head swim.

"God, you're a greedy hole," red-head growls, thrusting sloppy and rough. "You want me to fuck your cunt all night, don't you boy?"

Despite himself, Will's cock twitches in response and he lets his panting, heavy breathes answer when words seem too effortful. He keeps his hands on the wall and his head down, watching as his cock bounces neglected between his splayed legs.

When he can feel how close the other man is, he arches back in encouragement, lets out a wanton moan served to satisfy. At last, he feels the jerking final thrusts, then the throbbing of the other man's cock in his ass.

It's a second-hand release. He doesn't bother with himself, that's not really the point. He's drunk, worked up, and for at least twenty minutes now, has managed not to have Hannibal lurch into his thoughts uninvited. It's enough.

He's got his pants up and is about to turn to give the guy a courteous head nod on his way out the alley, a *thanks for all your help,* when red-head grabs hold of of his shoulder and spins him round.

"Where you going, little shit?" he asks with a post-orgasmic grin. His other hand comes up to press roughly into the hollows of Will's cheeks. "Gotta pay for a fuck that good."

Will's eyes meet red-head's for the first time that night. A fine arching of his brow says *fuck off* as effectively as his mouth might. He's still fuzzy with remnant sexual fever borrowed off of the stranger. Certainly he must come off a little on edge, must reflect back a familiar energy that the other man should recognize. *You don't want to play with me* , he tries to send out, and hopes the message is received.

He shrugs his shoulder to give the man another chance to reconsider, but his grip stays firm.

Well then.

When Will twists to bring his right foot down hard on - no, *through* - red-head's shin, he swells with an overwhelming pleasure. His arms snake up and over the man's extended forearm, both hands finding purchase before he pivots red-head around too quick, eliciting a satisfying wet popping of a shoulder dislocating.

Red-head crumples before him, folding in on himself still further when Will lets go of his grip on his arm. In the span of seconds, he's replaced his fucked-out flush with a heated rage; he can feel the pent-up cruelty the guy had held in check through the sex and now he wants to let it burn out.

But the man has started howling and they're more out on the main sidewalk than in the alley by now and he needs to leave. Will weaves his fingers into the fiery hair, holding his head up by its roots and lets his other fist connect solidly with cartilage and bone. Once, twice, three times he punches in the man's nose before he pushes him down and stumbles out onto the street. He takes a circuitous route home, jacks off, and passes out.

When he checks his phone the next morning, there are no new messages.

Two days later, his knuckles are nearly healed and Will has come down to a more familiar level of agitation. He is overworked and overwhelmed, but at least he knows what he's dealing with.

The disorientation he feels concerning Hannibal is unacceptable, he's decided after the red-head. Who is he to affect him this much? To get sucked into the minds of others is one thing. With Hannibal, it's a loss of his own self-control that he resents. He is comfortable behind his guards; that one person seems capable of disarming him so completely is dangerous and unnecessary.

Maybe the lack of contact suggests the feeling is mutual. Maybe he's being slow to pick up on what the other has realized days ago. Okay. Onward.

"... and he says she'd have seen the fight from her window." Thompson pauses as she parks the car on a poorly-kept stretch of small duplexes. She shoots Will an annoyed look, though her voice stays characteristically soft, "Graham, where are you?"

Will blinks a few times to reorient himself. They're over near St. Claude, about to interview a potential witness of last night's double homicide. Here is his break from thinking about anything related to Hannibal; he needs to latch on.

He gives Thompson a tired smile and adjusts his glasses. "I'm here. Just…" he pauses to reconsider the crime photos again in his mind, the unusual direction of arterial spray across the hood of the car where police had found the first victim. The angle is all wrong for how the body had fallen, almost as though they'd been repositioned after death. He looks towards the house where they're heading and back to where the car had been parked the night before.

"When we're done here," he begins and pivots in his seat. "let's check over there next. Better view of the scene." He points to a house three down from the address they'd been given.

Thompson's relief sweeps her annoyance away; it's never a difficult task to redirect her concern for him with some focus. She kills the engine and they both head towards the first house.

No one answers the door on their first try. It's 11 am on a Thursday, the residential street is deserted, but they are expected. They're about to try the bell a second time when a loud thump from inside the house makes them both perk up, alert.

They stay silent, listening. From inside comes another set of noises, like cookware clattering over the floor, followed by a heavy, muffled groan. A distinct creaking of footsteps heading to the back of the house.

"Round back," Will mouths, then motions to Thompson where he's heading. Thompson places her hand on the butt of her gun and nods. She moves away from the door to take a look inside a front window.

The backyard is little more than a sandpit with some trashed patio furniture strewn about haphazardly. Will unsnaps his holster, but doesn't immediately take out the gun. He keeps close to the side of the building, and heads for the back door.

Just before he makes to check the handle, the quietest crunch of gravel behind him makes him pause. He spins, his gun up and pointed directly at Hannibal's chest.

He doesn't so much as flinch before the weapon, but gives Will a warm smile. The gnawing buzz and anxious tingle that's persisted within Will all week is immediately gone. He lowers and reholsters his gun, looking at Hannibal with a bewildered look. Somewhere in his calm expression, Will thinks he sees relief.

"What are you.." he begins, but it doesn't seem worth it to finish the sentence. Hannibal's smile widens at that, and it crinkles the smooth skin about his eyes.

Hannibal moves swiftly, as though to embrace him and Will lets it happen. He sees Hannibal's hand about the plunger of the needle a fraction before he registers the sharp prick of metal sliding in just above the collar of his shirt. It's only a couple of seconds before his knees buckle under his weight and he falls helplessly into Hannibal's chest.

Before he passes out, he manages to turn his beguiled face to look at Hannibal. "Is s'alright," he slurs, every word an effort. "But I'da come if ya'd jus call'd."

Chapter End Notes

warnings for: fantasized cannibalism, unsafe sex (blow job), non-hannigram sex scene (drunk will and random dude), drunken bad (violent) decisions, abduction

i'm off to RDC tomorrow, would love to say hi to any and all! whenever possible, i'll be the sleepy awkward one with a coffee in one hand and a beer in the other.
@trikemily on twitter, tumblr (not on much), pillowfort etc

Chapter 9

Chapter Notes

> if you're 19k into this, you probably know what to expect. i thought about posting a warning below like i have previously, but... everything is fucked about this story. nothing too graphic, but i'm sure there will be again. individual chapter warnings seem a little unnecessary this far in. feel free to let me know if you disagree.
>
> hannibal's pov, then will's

The undulation of Will's chest calms him as though he is watching the sea. There is a hypnotism to it, watching the up and down and down and down. He feels more solid staring at its rhythm.

In the dim light, he might imagine his chest cracked open, exposing the lungs to inflate and collapse again and again and again. He was getting better about delaying gratification. Though when it came to Will, this was a different sort of temptation. To suck marrow from his bones would be magnificent, surely. The way he'd tasted before had struck him dizzy and crowded his evenings with tantalizing thoughts.

But there is something more addicting about Will that cannot be captured through annihilation. It had sunk its teeth into him on their first encounter, and gnaws at him now: an obsession growing more insatiable with every visit. Gurgling below the surface, Will holds back a roiling violence, temporarily sated by turning it on himself.

Several days ago, he had left Will's house knowing two things. The first: that should he eventually witness Will relinquish control, it would surely inspire such overwhelming awe that no conceivable death would compare. The second: that Will was too self-destructive, too pro-social to give in. Not yet; he needed time.

Hannibal had left that morning, resolved to keep his distance, and finish out his internship in relative calm. Perhaps he would learn to find joy in the savagery by which he'd already marked his claim.

Maybe, eventually, he might track him down again. And he could still check-in. Of course. Especially when they were so close.

But then: the red-head in the alley.

Not for the first time with Will, Hannibal reworked his plans.

Now, he watches the rapid scanning of Will's eyes from behind his thin lids. He would like to imagine that what is being reconsolidated isn't only Will's last moments before he'd toppled

into Hannibal's arms. It's a comfort to consider that what runs through his mind is something less one-sided, less confusing.

Though he hadn't looked confused, at least not for long. Hannibal had begun to notice that Will could broadcast his emotions undiluted, when it suited him. Behind the house, just before the needle - Hannibal had seen trust. In that moment he hadn't known what to do with it.

There is the possibility that he is wrong. To look at Will and see reflected back such warmth, a nearly blissful anticipation: this was not something he could have predicted. He had not considered the possibility that under the circumstances, Will might have come willingly. Might have been waiting to be taken.

The thought borders on fantastical; absolutely self-indulgent. He knows that.

But there had been *something* , as he'd looked up at him heavy-lidded and dragging into unconsciousness.

Another hour or so, and he'll wake. Once Will is more alert, he'll have an opportunity to test reality against his perception of it. Then, he might consider untying him.

The rental has no basement - it's not a standard feature in the once swampy grounds. He'd kept him somewhere more isolated for the first day, mindful of the proximity of his neighbors. The old houses were not built to trap sound. It would be rude to cause of nuisance.

He'd moved him back to the house after he'd had a chance to complete the procedures. Cordectomies and glossectomies were not well practiced procedures for him, but the process was straightforward enough. Hannibal had been fairly impressed with how the swelling had come down in the last 24 hours.

He wasn't completely incapable of making noise of course, though blessedly the morphine sulphate Hannibal had supplemented his IV with kept him relatively sedate. His occasional half-hearted thrashing about in his restraints served little more than to make the old boards under the bed creak unpleasantly, a noise which could be heard clearly from below in the dining room.

He'd dined al fresco last evening. That had helped.

The guest room door swings noiselessly into the bedroom. The red-head, whose face is mottled ugly purples and greens and yellows, locks eyes with Hannibal, tracking his approach towards his bedside.

"Good evening, Mr. Pines," he says, moving his hands to palpate the tender tissue of the red-head's throat and jaw, paying particular attention to the skin around the new stoma.

Mr. Pines - Josh, more informally - exhales in wheezing, whistling noises. His nostrils flare, both with terror and unnecessary effort now that he can rely on the tracheal tube.

Hannibal busies himself with other checks, injects an antibiotic through the IV port, and then removes the blanket to expose his bare legs. The squelching noise that the lotion dispenser makes when Hannibal pumps the product into his hands makes Josh groan piteously.

Hannibal sits himself neatly on the edge of the bed and takes Josh's calf in his greased hands, beginning to massage deeply into the muscle.

“I have increased the dosage somewhat more than we had previously discussed, Mr. Pines,” he begins, kneading the occasional knot from the muscle in the red-head’s leg. “You may feel more drowsy as a result, but I do not anticipate any additional nausea.”

He takes a moment to consider the wild fear in Josh's features that seems to claw up from behind the sedated veil. He frowns slightly, more to himself. “I regret not having set your nose from earlier, it will make healing more painful. I apologize, my time was rather limited.”

Josh's brows pinch in anger, and his hand shifts and grasps blindly at nothing. It’s all he can do. Hannibal smiles in return, then wipes his hands clean with a cloth. Leaning over, he pats the stub just below Josh's knee, where his broken leg had previously been. Below him, Josh writhes in an attempt to distance himself from Hannibal’s touch.

“I spent nearly an hour removing the fragments of tibia from the meat, Mr. Pines. Unsalvageable, unfortunately.” He lies easily. “But your general good health is helping with recovery. Your risk for sepsis has declined considerably.

“I am hosting a guest for some time, he arrived while you were sleeping.” Hannibal pauses, patient, watching the man’s pupils constrict as he takes in the information. “I hope he will be up for seeing you again soon. I’d prefer not to delay more formal introductions.”

Hannibal hums a sonata under his breath, then settles comfortably into silence while he makes his final checks. Josh's eyes grow droopy but don’t come off Hannibal.

“Take care, Mr. Pines. Sleep well.”

Will knows where he is before he opens his eyes - the light bedding envelops him, his head has sunk deep into the downy pillows; everything is familiar and warm.

Will blinks the room into soft focus, taking in features that he had only glimpsed over before slipping out and into the kitchen last time he had been here. For a rental, the space feels oddly personalized: oriental prints cover one wall, depicting either scenes of pornography or torture or both - the details swim too much to confirm. Brass and pewter vases akin to funeral urns

carefully litter the fireplace mantle, tangled among branches of fibrous cotton bolls and some blue-green ivy that he doesn't recognize. Will has no use for trinkets, they only make moving more difficult. Not for the first time, he considers how Hannibal seems to demand the world shift its aesthetics for him, however brief his visit.

He hears the quiet creak of Hannibal's steps just before he enters the room and tries to shift in bed to take him in. He moves his hands down in order to sit up, but they meet immediate resistance. Another confused yank confirms it: his wrists are bound together and tied to the bed posts. *Well* .

"Wha-- Hannibal?" he asks, his voice uncooperative and groggy. What he wants most of all is to rub the sleep from his eyes and twist just enough to be able to see Hannibal's expression. He feels too warm and too loopy to feel more than mild annoyance at the situation.

Hannibal moves into his line of sight, offering a glass of water. Awkwardly, he takes a sip.

They regard each other in silence. Will's mind feels honey-thick; it's too much effort to process any micro-expressions that might flit over Hannibal's face. Hannibal is nothing more than a smooth veneer.

Hannibal breaks the silence. "You would have come with me?"

The answer is immediate: "Yes." he pauses to cough again, accepting another sip. "You shouldn't have, though. I - I was working. I would have come. Just, after."

Hannibal swallows before responding. "I waited as long as I was able."

Will nods slowly, because he understands. The gravity of this home had been pulling at him for days; it's unclear how much longer he could have fought against it.

This is such a bad idea , he thinks. But then again he thinks, *I'm so tired* .

He shimmies in the bed, feeling a pinch in his shoulder as he twists his body uncomfortably to face him. If Hannibal notices the way his jaw tightens at the sensation, he doesn't let on.

Will's eyes narrow in on a truth. "You're scared," he says, clenching and stretching his fingers to keep the blood flowing.

"Cautious."

"You abducted me on shift." His eyebrows raise in disbelief. "This is being cautious?"

Hannibal sets the glass on the side table. His hand returns to skim up the naked skin of Wills' arm, from bicep to bound wrist. His fingers skate over the rope. He realizes that under the covers, he's naked. A hesitant desire sparks in him.

"It isn't the police that I have difficulty predicting," Hannibal says heavily, eyes fixated on the flexing of Will's fingers.

“You don’t need to keep me tied up.” He tries out the words. It’s discomfiting that they feel a lot like a confession.

Hannibal’s hand moves from scratching pink marks into his forearm to clinically gripping at his wrist to check his pulse. It’s heavy, but even. A slow whoosh whoosh whoosh as it floods behind his ears.

“But… you don’t trust me either,” Will adds. If the bondage was only about sex, then he'd already feel bloody and sore from it. He’s naked, yes, but untouched. He wonders if, for Hannibal, it's ever only been about sex.

“Would you, if our situation were reversed?” Hannibal’s gaze shifts away from Will’s hands to stare into his eyes, hunting. His head tilts and a quick snarl curls his upper lip before it relaxes again.

Will doesn’t trust himself, even now. That’s sort of the crux of all of this, isn’t it? But honesty isn't going to help him, so he tries another approach.

“Come here,” he demands. The words come out as a rough whisper.

Hannibal blinks once, then leans down to let their lips touch, tentative against Will’s own. It is the antithesis of what they have shared before. His chest aches - it *always* aches - but this isn't prompted by some unraveling need to quiet his mind through pain and submission. Between them swells forgiveness, affinity, solidarity. It’s hesitant, but if it isn’t just one-sided, it has the potential to be far more dangerous than violence. The shock of it makes him gasp.

As much as he can, he surges up for more.

The evening chirps and buzzes with life; Will feels hyper-aware of the sparse light, his pupils blown wide with the come-down from the drug, saturating his mind with near-hallucinogenic detail. He thinks, *Is this what adoration feels like?*

He rubs absently at the rope burns on his wrist, causing Hannibal to shoot him an appreciative smile as he leans over to plate their meal. It’s much too late for dinner, Will isn’t hungry in the slightest, but the smell of the meat in front of him is undeniably mouth-watering.

“Ossobuco with gremolata, served over saffron polenta.” Hannibal explains, drizzling the rust-red juices to pool and bleed over the central bone.

Will nods his head, waits for Hannibal to take his place, then cuts in. The flavor stalls him mid-bite, and his eyebrows shoot up before he can temper his reaction. It’s the right one to

make though, as Hannibal practically *purrs* watching his satisfaction spill past the bounds of his control.

“How will you handle your work obligations?” Hannibal asks, so casually that it throws Will off kilter. The question is swollen with unspoken negotiation. He doesn’t know where to begin.

“So you grab me, and I sort out the consequences?” he replies, a bit unkindly.

“Will you?”

Will you *what* ? Weave an unbelievable tale for why you disappeared mid-shift? Forgive a virtual stranger a possessive streak that has now blown past amorous obsession? Jump tongue first into something almost certainly unsustainable and self-destructive?

Will considers for a long time, sipping from his wine glass and taking another slow, savoring bite.

“Yes.”

Hannibal’s eyes twinkle, literally fucking twinkle and he flashes an unrestrained smile. Immediately, Will lifts his hand - knife still in grip - to stop him.

“I think it’s time we need to talk about boundaries.”

Hannibal laughs at this, seemingly unaffected by Will’s hesitancy. “I thought you didn’t want to talk about boundaries.”

“You hadn’t drugged me without consent.”

Hannibal’s brows arch. “That’s not true.”

Will shrugs dismissively. “You hadn’t drugged me without consent while I was working.”

Hannibal’s mood sombers, and he puts down his cutlery to give him his full attention. “It is possible that this conversation is coming too late to be of any consequence.” Hannibal’s words turn over with sickly anticipation. “You have seen more of me than I had anticipated showing.”

Will shakes his head and frowns, “I don’t see you at all. Haven’t you been listening?”

“You refuse to see yourself,” Hannibal corrects. “And in so doing, deny what is before you. That is not the same as being truly blind.”

Will blinks, taking in the gravity of the observation. Unconsciously, his nostrils flare in indignation and his grip about the steak knife turns his knuckles pink, then yellow, then white. There’s a fascination in what Hannibal is admitting about himself - about both of them. It sets him immediately on edge.

“Since meeting me, has sleep come easier for you?” Hannibal asks. “If your trouble rests with how easily people invade your mindspace - except when you’re with me - have you benefited from the reprieve?

“You are more capable than you admit to yourself, Will. I would have you show me who you are, but you hold this back from both of us.”

The implication makes Will nauseous. He knows, or rather he *feels* what Hannibal insinuates, the way he *felt* an erupting satisfaction when he watched Donders die in his mind’s eye. It’s undeniable and entirely unacceptable.

His question tastes bitter on his tongue, “You think that you don’t affect me because... we are too alike?”

Hannibal picks up his glass and swirls the wine with a twist of his wrist. He interprets the easy-going way Hannibal reacts as further fodder for his own self-loathing. He *knows* , but he absolutely must be wrong. They cannot be dancing around the same proclivities, not this casually.

“I think, perhaps, we complement one another. More than you will admit,” says Hannibal, drawing the wine in languidly over his lips. “It is a theory.”

“A theory!” Will mouths in astonishment. “It’s an incredibly unsavory theory, Hannibal.”

He catches the way Hannibal's eyes flick to their half-eaten meal before landing back to address him directly. “Maybe. Though perhaps it’s merely a matter of taste.”

Chapter 10

Chapter Notes

> A bit longer getting this one together, both for fic and life reasons. This is ballooning to be bigger than I had originally thought but I'm hoping to keep it in the 15ish chapter range.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

After dinner, they take a short walk to a payphone, where Will weaves an absolutely pitiful tale to Thompson. Hannibal's lips thin in displeasure as he listens in; at one point, they stretch so far over his teeth, it's nearly a smile.

He enjoys watching me squirm, Will thinks, half annoyed, half endeared.

"Just a couple of days. I haven't been myself, I just need a couple of days." Will repeats several more times. When he thinks Thompson has been snagged into the lies, primarily by way of her desire to believe him and likely not at all by Will's half-assed attempt to excuse his sudden departure, he gets her to agree to take Zoe in for a few days.

Hannibal remains casually alert throughout the call. Will thinks he sees him perk up slightly more when the sound of sirens pick up unexpectedly a few blocks away, though that could be Will projecting. His heart is racing; he shouldn't assume Hannibal's is, too.

"Thanks, Thompson. Yeah, I'll connect later. Alright - bye." He is physically lighter for having put the grimy receiver back.

He looks up at Hannibal, waiting for some sort of next step. He figures he's owed at least a brief reprieve from having to take the reigns of his life, considering Hannibal is entirely at fault for its current detour.

Hannibal's hand touches the curve of Will's back gently, guiding him to pivot around. Will lets the distance between them disappear, and sags visibly into Hannibal's chest when he is positioned there.

"Come home," Hannibal says into Will's hair, unabashedly taking a long, hedonistic inhale that pulls a sad smile from Will.

They spend the majority of the next day outside, in a dissociated haze separate from either of their lives. The backyard of Hannibal's rental is private, overwhelmingly dense with magnolia and purple iris. Hannibal sits in a shady patch of the cobbled patio, switching between stacks

of notes and sketching. Will, resting in the pillowy grass under a Cypress tree, knows he's the focus of Hannibal's attention as he works. Coming from someone else, he would grow antsy under the scrutiny. With Hannibal, he feels a psychological chill push between them whenever he switches back to his work files. Eventually, he can't stand it any longer and they move inside, spending the evening entangled, Will soaked in whiskey and Hannibal purring contentment.

I'll go home tomorrow, he thinks and truly means it. Hannibal doesn't work the next day and Will accepts his offer of a fresh shirt and slacks and doesn't go anywhere.

“Why surgery?” Will asks from below Hannibal, his fingers never quieting as he runs them along Hannibal's back and shoulders. It's day three, or nearly so, the sky beginning to lighten by degrees through the gauze-thin curtains. He starts on-call at 7 am.

He takes his time to answer Will’s question, not because he needs to consider his response, but because Will's heart under his ear has kicked up its rhythm and the change fascinates him.

“The challenge suited me,” he begins, paying attention to the ba-thump ba-thump ba-thump under Will's ribs. “The human body is a phenomenal creation.”

“People are motivated by power, affiliation, or achievement,” Will says offhandedly. His voice is already distant, as though he's lost interest in the conversation. The energy humming through his veins is a giveaway though; he's only calm on the outside.

“What about aesthetics?” Hannibal asks, tilting his head up to catch any potential reaction.

There isn't one, at least outwardly. Under his ear, the beating stays as frenzied as before. “The beauty that lays in the annihilation of God's creation?” Will asks.

“In robbing the Devil his due,” he corrects.

“So it's power, then.”

“Maybe.” Hannibal concedes.

Will shifts beneath him, unsettled. To give him focus, and simply because he can, Hannibal picks a corner of the thick scab off an edge of the sutured wound on Will's chest. Will inhales sharply, and immediately settles. Will watches as Hannibal lazily drags a thin trail of red down to his nipple, circles it, then lets it fall off.

He considers his next response for a time before proceeding. “I nearly decided against surgery in residency. It was the smell. Too many chronic illnesses have their own distinct odors.”

Will huffs a laugh. “Wait until they've been dead for four or five days.”

Hannibal hums, a smile pulling the corners of his mouth. His teeth scrape lazily against Will's muscle. “You misunderstand. It isn't the decay that irritated me. There is a certain perfume to

an otherwise healthy dead body." Ba-thump ba-thump ba-thump: the pace quickens. "The cancers are the most abhorrent. Almost moldy, and sharply sour."

"But emergency surgery has a higher rate of accidental injury?"

He hums his agreement, then probes a finger back under the wet edge of the reopened cut. Will's hands stall as he traces meaningless patterns across the muscles of his back, nails digging in for a beat.

"Higher incidence of death?" The question is quieter, Will's attention divided between the pain on his chest and the conversation.

Hannibal pulls at the cut, then brings his finger to his lips: wild fruit and pennies. Will's neck cranes to keep watch. "Not necessarily. It is truly fascinating to see what a person can withstand of their body's destruction."

Will's breath stops at that, there's no need for Hannibal to be paying close attention to notice.

"I can't get the… destruction out of my head," he confesses with his exhale.

Hannibal lifts himself up and shifts to more fully cover Will, pressing down heavily like a weighted blanket. When he tilts his hips, his cock pushes against the warmth of Will's inner thigh and he begins to thicken at the contact. Will is long past him: the hard jut of his arousal leaves a wet smear over Hannibal's abdomen.

"You say that as though you consider it a problem." Hannibal says evenly. "It is, after all, your job." His own pleasure twitches in his gut. He knows what Will tortures himself over is far more than a professional curiosity. The anticipation of confession makes his nostrils flare, his eyes dilate. He is open, willing to bare witness to the admission of sin. Of even a desire to sin. He thinks of his other house guest, smiles.

Will's eyes fall closed as Hannibal ruts themselves together again, more obviously this time. He keeps them shut when he speaks next, "There's a case right now. It's -" he falters, struggling to put emotions into language. "I usually can recreate a scene from a victim's perspective. I feel their fear or anger or see through their eyes."

"You empathize with the victim, which in turn brings you close to the killer." Hannibal muses. This ability to hyper-empathize pulls at him, as it has each time Will has made mention of the way others affect him.

Not me , he thinks. *Not yet*.

"This one though…" he stops, finding himself unable to continue the thought.

"The killer has drawn you in." Hannibal completes it for him. Will arches up, his cockhead rubbing against the rough hair trailing down Hannibal's stomach only to freeze beneath him immediately after, as though he only just realized what set off his reaction.

Hannibal doesn't need to press his ear to Will's chest any longer to gauge his affectation. Will is nearly shaking underneath him, chest tight, cock hard, nails dragging down his back to his

ass.

Hannibal thinks idly of how long he might be able to hold Will's tortured heart, rabbiting away in his hands, before it would stutter and give out under the pressure of his grip.

"He's taking pieces." Will's breath quivers with the words. He sucks in air; his chest ballooning out, skin pulled tight to saturate alveoli.

"I understand trophies are not uncommon for a certain type of offender." He mouths the words over the hard edges of Will's jaw, which Will arches up and away, exposing the sinew of his neck and the thump thump thumping of arterial flow under skin.

"Mmm, no." Will's eyes are still closed, his brows crinkled with a confusion of sensation. "I don't take trophies."

Hannibal marvels at the slip in phrasing, pushes himself more wantonly to rub up against Will.

Will continues: "When I take parts.. I don't keep them. When he kills - I feel *famished* ."

Hannibal lets slip a reactive moan, then covers Will's mouth with his own. Their kiss is furious, gluttonous. Tongues slot together, rub upon one another, lips get caught up between teeth until they are both bleeding.

Will gasps when they part, sinks his claws deep into Hannibal's ass to keep them pressed together, rocking, jilting, rough against one another.

"I would see your hunger satisfied," Hannibal says, pulling back only enough to catch his breath.

Will makes a high-pitched whine in the back of his throat. His eyes are wild; he is burning, feverish below him. Fueling his arousal is that terrifying, reprehensible part of Will that Hannibal wants to rip from underneath, worship beneath, hand-feed sacred offerings, and bathe in blood. The shame keeps him just short of igniting.

"You starve yourself, Will. Can that which nourishes really be so condemnable?"

Will makes a pitiful, ruined noise in response, tilts his head back further still.

Hannibal shifts to spread Will's legs apart, meeting no resistance. He shifts down, his cock rubbing wet streaks that divide Will in two. His hands grope blindly in the sea of sheets until he finds the discarded lube. He breaks away just long enough to push himself back on his haunches, to fold Will up further, to squirt lube directly onto his already red asshole. Quickly, too quickly, he is three fingers deep, curling round, and Will is whimpering and out of breath.

His fingers slide easily through the mess; Will has been eager for him again and again and again, and Hannibal has taken advantage of keeping him close.

Maybe it is power driving him, he thinks as he makes Will squirm below him. There is an undeniable Machiavellian attraction to pulling at Will's seams, reaping the rewards of that

which might spill forth. Power, achievement, affiliation - they are all entwined where it comes to his motivations for Will. Whatever the basis for his urges, he only knows they must be satisfied.

“Tell me what you’re scared of, Will. Tell me why now, why this time, have you come to empathize with the killer and not the victim.” He rubs relentless against the smooth lining of Will’s insides, right there, until Will quivers and bucks to try to ease the onslaught. He doesn't stop. He wants him screaming. He’d see him howl.

His fingers make obscene squelching noises as he moves them that mix in with Will’s overstimulated groans, his gasping slurping breath. He can feel it, see it: insides buzzing, abs tightening. He can let him explode.

He twists and slides his fingers, then pulls out completely. Will’s eyes flash open, accusatory more than confused. His asshole convulses around nothing. Hannibal grabs Will’s cock around the base, hard enough to make him wince. “Tell me your unsavory thoughts, Will.”

Will’s eyes dart wildly across Hannibal’s face, as though he is desperate to find something in his expression, or behind it, underneath it, that might complement Hannibal's words.

Hannibal sees it, then. How badly Will *wants* to let the thing inside him run wild.

“*Will*,” he demands, and like that, Will deflates completely.

“I want to do it,” he admits, finally, then quickly corrects himself, “It’s not just the violence. That - that isn’t new.”

Hannibal notices, distantly, that he has stopped breathing as he waits. He carefully eases his grip on Will’s cock, forcing himself to stroke him at an agonizingly slow pace.

“He isn't taking trophies, is he Will?” Hannibal asks, unable to keep the amusement out of his voice.

Will shakes his head, cants his hips up as if pleading for more of Hannibal's unkind touch. “No. He's taking ingredients. And he's leaving the rest to *waste* . ” A shuddering sigh, hips squirming. “I can’t stop thinking about it.”

Hannibal nods in encouragement. He needs to hear it: “What can’t you stop thinking about, Will?”

His grip loosens, touch feather-light against Will’s weeping cock.

Will inhales shakily, slowly. He is peeling back Hannibal’s calm facade in search of disgust, or condemnation, or perhaps, even some superficial fascination with his freakhood, Hannibal isn’t sure. Whatever he’s looking for though, he doesn’t find. It makes his brows wrinkle all the more, so sure that what he craves is irrevocably vile, a part of him that will stay forever shamed and hidden and never, ever shared.

Hannibal can read this on him, because the feelings are familiar enough to what he tormented himself with, once upon a time, however briefly. Before acceptance, before appreciation. The

sweetness of what's to come - if Will allows it - makes his teeth ache.

"*Say it*," he insists, his hand coming off Will's cock entirely to rest flat across his hip bone.

"I- I imagine how they tasted." The words fall out of him like a dam bursting. "I see the bodies too late, they aren't *fresh* but I can imagine it. I can imagine the rumble in his gut when he takes them. I think, sometimes, it's too inescapable a need, too perfect a reward. I want to destroy them; I can't stop myself from wanting it."

The heft of Will's confession crashes over Hannibal. Instinctively, he tilts his head up to keep from being overcome by its power.

"You want to kill. To devour." he rephrases, as though he were unable to trust his ears. Will visibly shudders hearing his need so plainly turned back at him. He looks directly into Hannibal's eyes and nods, once, slowly. Unavoidable confirmation.

Yes.

Yes , Hannibal's mind slithers, and immediately, he has two fingers thrust back into Will so quickly that he yells sharply before he succumbs to his misuse.

"Yes," Hannibal affirms, slowing his pace to calm himself more than Will.

"Yes," he says again, then plunges to take his mouth. Will whimpers, whether from stimulation or the relief of unburdening himself of the load, Hannibal doesn't care. He is addicted; needs to hear him unravel again and again and again until he is left only a tangle of raw nerves.

After a moment, both of them buzzing from the shared secret, Will at last grabs Hannibal's wrist. His face is unreadable to Hannibal, a confliction of several emotions.

"You wouldn't ever-" he cuts himself off.

A smile bursts across Hannibal's face. "Ask me," he taunts, finger rubbing relentless against Will's insides.

Will looks at him, shattered, but he shakes his head: "No."

Hannibal slides his fingers out, moves himself swiftly off the bed. Will groans, reaches out to Hannibal before stopping himself. Realization sets in, and he scrambles up, suddenly awash in self-consciousness. The look that flashes across his face - Betrayal? Indignity? - it pulls deep at Hannibal. Will is beautiful in his suffering.

"Stay here," he says simply, combing a hand through Will's tangles. Will whimpers, uncertainly, but nods.

Then, naked, heart steady, he moves with purpose out of the bedroom.

Hannibal is gone what may be no more than three minutes, though to Will it stretches forward and back, consuming every point in time. His pulse races, its hammering so thunderously heavy in his ears that his vision jerks with every beat.

In that time, he thinks of Donders and the mottled skin of all her pieces. He thinks of how rewarding the effort would have been to work his muscles against her partner's bones in order to saw through and separate his leg. How, if it had been him, he would have ruined the meat with dozens of jaw-locking bites and tears before he ever could get the leg removed. He thinks of the asshole in the alley and the slick crunch of cartilage grinding into bone below his fist; how he'd almost not stopped himself.

He thinks of Hannibal, his foot rubbing hard into the cuts he'd dressed shortly before. How he'd clawed half moon slivers into his palms while Hannibal had fucked himself on his cock, worried the gaping gash with tongue and teeth. If it hadn't been for the pain grounding him, he might have relented, given Hannibal the recklessness that he seemed to crave.

He doesn't think of how shameful these thoughts are, because it the feeling is too interweaved in his imaginings to need to pull the feeling out to be examined on its own. He wishes very much that he'd kept on drinking through dinner, urged Hannibal to put him under and let the ever-present guilt get fucked away through his submission. But that was hours ago, and his words sit like lead in his gut.

Now Hannibal is back, and despite the shuddering self-contempt, his cock jumps at the sight of him placing down a metal tray and climbing back over his body.

He looks at the tray: scalpel, antiseptic, an empty shallow dish, lots of gauze and surgical tape.

Oh.

“I've thought about killing you many times, Will,” Hannibal says, encouraging Will to turn over onto his stomach. “It is not sympathy that has kept you alive. I'll be honest: I don't quite know myself what has.”

Will should feel scared. Hannibal has moved over him, straddling his thighs and is rubbing himself against Will's ass. This should be terrifying.

He thinks instead he is mildly disappointed.

“And now? Have you changed your mind?” He asks. His skin burns where Hannibal caresses down his spine.

“You have struck my curiosity.”

Will tries to press up onto his elbows, but Hannibal's firm hand pushes him back down. He considers whether he should struggle in earnest. He doesn't really want to.

Will lets go of punched out breath as Hannibal slips his cock inside him, plunges deep and then grinds in unapologetically for his own pleasure.

“This isn't curiosity,” Will pants, being pushed slowly upward on the bed. “This is sadism.”

Above him, Hannibal lets out a heavy chuckle, pulls out slowly to push in fully again. “Sadistic curiosity. It serves me well that your sadism has been so inwardly focused.”

“You mean masochism.”

“Do I?” Hannibal thrusts several more times and then seats himself deep inside Will. He hears metal clanging against metal. “Hold still.”

Will strains his neck to see around, but Hannibal holds him firmly enough that he soon relents and takes a stabling breath into the feather-soft pillow.

The antiseptic's cold is a welcome relief against his fiery skin. Hannibal continues his movements as he cleans, at times running purposely around where Will is most sensitive. Against his better judgement, he ruts himself into the sheets and lets out a quiet moan.

He immediately freezes at the first slice of the blade along his shoulder. This is no erotic, shallow pull of metal through skin meant to entice, though he thinks he nevertheless hears Hannibal suck in a breath when Will feels the blood start to drip down his side. The pain is bright and sharp; he breathes into it and immediately feels calmer.

“What's the end goal, Hannibal?” He asks, not sure he wants to know.

“We're going to eat you.” He says simply, finishing a second slice perpendicular to the first. Will can't help the edge of his smile from leaking out until the rush of self-loathing shatters the moment and makes him whimper. “Only a taste.”

He makes two more cuts, completing a square. The sensation from the blade, until now distinct and sharp, begins to burn and blur at the square's corner. The slide of the scalpel under his flesh is invasive, intimate, undeniably horrific to feel. Beads of sweat erupt over her forehead; one slides down and along the bridge of his nose, stinging when it mixes with the wet around his eyes. He doesn't dare move but for breathing. He can feel Hannibal shifting inside him, feel the pulse of his cock when Will tries to brace himself from any propulsion his gyrations make. Though his focus is decidedly elsewhere, nevertheless he feels a visceral satisfaction whenever he clenches around Hannibal and feels him react.

Hannibal finishes cutting quickly, but the pain only builds upon itself. Where flesh is peeled off, the air hits against raw underneaths and it singes in the most spectacular way. The sensation may not be the most extreme he's ever endured, though nothing has felt quite as exposing as Hannibal, inside him, shifting, flaying, taking what Will has been unable to claim from another.

It feels fucking fantastic. He lets out an anguished noise.

A square of Will sloughs off his shoulder, and Hannibal places it carefully into the shallow dish. Hannibal leans forward, pressing himself close, nearly collapsing into the wet red space. The dish is placed beside him, directly in his line of sight. Maybe only a few square inches, yet the pain receptors along his entire back and neck are going haywire. For a moment, he's

sure that this is only a fraction of what Hannibal has claimed. He must be a half flayed man, based on how his body screams.

Hannibal's breath is hot on his neck and ear. He sounds winded, more than he ever has before.

“You come apart so beautifully.” He whispers, fucking in harder now that the scalpel is gone.

He shifts, hits Will exactly where he needs it, and Will is coming hard into the mess of dirty sheets. Hannibal shudders at the convulsions around his cock and buries his cheek into the fresh wound. The pressure elevates his pain tenfold; sparks light up behind his eyes. Even with his jaws locked tight, he is unable to hold back his first scream. Hannibal growls, low and needy, then follows him over the edge.

Chapter End Notes

I've got a one-shot that needs attention, but then I'll be back to this. And dammit, what I've wanted to happen for maybe four or five chapters now is gonna finally happen. Mark my damn words.

Chapter 11

Chapter Notes

> Not to completely curse myself, but I'm going to try to write a little every day in April. Hopefully this means I can be a bit faster with the next couple of updates.

Will moves his whole body delicately, hyper aware of any position that makes pain boil up over his shoulder. After several hours, the relentless ache behind the bandages has drained him of all energy. He resents having been made to join Hannibal in the kitchen to begin lunch. He's uncoordinated with lethargy.

Hannibal busies himself behind the counter, pulling ingredients from the fridge, dicing vegetables, heating a pan. The way he moves through the kitchen's stations is mesmerizing. His feet are light over the tiles, making even his measured actions seem to flow from point to point.

The small glass container comes out of the fridge next. Will can't help himself. He tentatively approaches to get a closer look.

A pound of flesh, likely much less so.

The pain had been exquisite. Not at all like the sour, spoiled throbbing that distracts him now. Before, he had felt focused by it, his consciousness made up of every cell in his body. It's almost impossible to imagine the feeling again, with how starkly different he currently experiences the relationship between his body and his mind.

He doesn't know for sure what would pair well with his meat. Probably flavors that accentuate pork, maybe something sweet or with a spicy depth. He hates that he feels nothing when he realizes his tongue is coated in saliva.

"When was the first time you tried it?" he asks.

Hannibal's cutting rhythm skips a beat before resuming at a fractionally slower pace. Like he's shifting into a new gear, Will notices.

"Some time ago now. I went without for a while, but I came to realize my altered diet wasn't satisfying my needs."

Will lifts his head to examine Hannibal. "Your needs," he says evenly.

Hannibal smiles easily. "You seem amenable to trying a new menu."

He is, unmistakably. This wasn't what he had in mind - he thinks perhaps even that it may only stoke his desires to taste someone new. The anticipation of the meal keeps him present, despite the weariness pulling him to blankness. His eyebrows arch up. “It feels disrespectful to waste it.”

“I hope you find this recipe elevates the offering.” Hannibal agrees.

The word *offering* strikes him as implying more equality between a butcher and the meat than he would normally give the pair. Even considering the source of the meal, it feels a bit disingenuous coming from Hannibal’s mouth. But whenever Will thinks about if he would have refused, given the opportunity, his thoughts seem to fizzle out. What's it called if only one in a pair considers themselves an equal? He's not even sure it would apply, anyway.

From somewhere on the counter, he hears an insistent mechanical buzzing start up. Hannibal momentarily crinkles his brow then wipes his hands before retrieving the pager that has begun to dance across the concrete. His lips thin as he reads.

“Excuse me, I need to check in,” he says, and sweeps himself out of the kitchen.

Will stands before the ingredients, eyes fixed on the pale flesh. He never noticed that freckle before, and now it doesn't belong to him. He shoves his hands in his pockets to suppress his urges. His hands tingle, his teeth itch. He wants to push his fingers into the skin, dig his nails in until it splits and he sinks into the muscle. He wants to rend a chunk off and feel the fat begin to coat the inside of his mouth.

He might lose time, imagining it play out. Either he slips a bit, or Hannibal returns especially quickly. He’s glad not to be alone, regardless.

Hannibal doesn’t hide his frustration. “I’m afraid I have been called in,” he says, taking Tupperware out to store the half-prepped meal.

“What - now? For how long?” Will can’t help his anxiety from inflecting his words.

“A few hours, at least.”

“You can’t - I mean -” Will stops himself, aware of how desperate he must sound.

Hannibal turns round and closes the several feet that separate them, lacing his arms loosely around Will’s waist. He’s nowhere close to the bandages, but Will can’t help but wince when he lifts his shirt up to make contact with the bare skin of his lower back.

“I share your disappointment,” he says softly, with a look that might suggest faint amusement. “But everything will keep.”

Will's muscles immediately scream from being tensed for so long, so he closes his eyes and commands each part of his body to relax. Shoulders, arms, fists, stomach, *breathe.* Incrementally, he begins to calm.

“It’s okay,” he says, and thinks he means it. “I should leave anyway.”

Hannibal’s grasp around his waist stiffens noticeably.

“No,” he says, and Will laughs with the sincerity of it.

“I’ll come back. I shouldn’t - I *really* shouldn’t, but I’ll come back. I want to. I’ll head to the precinct and smooth this over, check in on Zoe if I can. I’m not working the weekend, anyway,” he says. Will finds his hand has begun stroking up and down Hannibal’s tensed tricep as if trying to soothe an aggravated animal.

Hannibal shakes his head a fraction, more to himself. “Will, you will stay.”

Not *I’d like you to stay.* Not *Please, stay, I won’t be gone long.*

Will jerks away at that, expecting Hannibal to break his embrace and let him move back. Hannibal doesn’t let up an inch.

“Hannibal, what the fuck. Let go.”

Will moves his hands up to push more forcibly against his chest. He barely registers Hannibal moving before he has Will's wrist in his grip, squeezing bone against bone. He imagines the sound of them grinding together.

Hannibal's expression is calm. Thick air before a storm calm. Silent forest before a predator attacks calm. Something shifts in Will as he realizes: he's got to go. *Now* .

Will doesn't rely much on the professional training he's received as an officer. When he's hyped up enough to need to fight, his brain defaults back to the uncoordinated but powerful techniques he picked up after years of playing the easy target as the smaller, weirder new kid in town. Instead of moving to immobilize the arm Hannibal is using to hold vice-like onto Will’s wrist, he lets his limb go completely limp. It has the effect of making Hannibal sag - just an inch of two - with the unexpected added weight. Before he can adjust, Will pulls him down further, and with his other arm he swings back then snaps up, aiming to drive his thumb into Hannibal’s trachea.

But Hannibal is too quick. He pivots as he is pulled forward, and Will's nail clumsily scratches the side of his neck instead. *Fuck.*

Will continues to move forward though, using the momentum of his failed blow to lunge forward and into Hannibal. His knee comes up and he hears the satisfying *oof* as the air is punched out of Hannibal’s gut.

His wrist is still locked tight in Hannibal's grip. Will yanks it back again, pulling Hannibal in towards him, trying to catch him off balance and make him fall. Hannibal is too sure-footed, but Will lands another, weaker hit, this time closer to the spleen. Hannibal grunts in what sounds more like frustration than pain.

Will's arm suddenly twists, sending a white hot shot of agony up the limb and into his shoulder. He sweeps around, at the mercy of Hannibal and only barely resists the drive to crumple under the pain. The bandage covering his raw back rips off from the torsion. Even

the gauze grazing over the exposed muscle makes him growl. He feels furious that his body can't just *shut off* for one goddamn minute so he can give Hannibal his full attention.

Hannibal ratchets his arm up once more, higher than it feels it should go without ripping tendons. He tries to rotate his body just enough to relieve the pressure and move him into a better striking space, but Hannibal kicks his leg from under him and suddenly nothing registers except blinding pain at his shoulder.

Will lands hard on his knees, screaming. Tears prick up instantaneously and blur his vision. His arm feels too thick, too long; it's dislocated.

Will shoots his working hand up in surrender. His fingers tremble. He's felt Hannibal's formidable strength before, gently touched dark bruises and welts for days after, reminding himself of the power Hannibal can unleash on him. To feel overpowered and out of control when they fuck is kind of the whole damn point, but this isn't that at all. And he's pretty sure now that even at their roughest, Hannibal has been holding back. He's disappointed in his body that he can't put up more of a fight, but then again he's so damn tired.

Hannibal doesn't let go, but straightens himself up into a less defensive posture. His useless arm straightens and he lets out a high whimper. The pain makes Will feel nauseous, he tastes bile bubbling up his throat.

"Jesus, mercy Hannibal," he says weakly, catching the way the light skips off Hannibal's eyes.

Hannibal eyes him, considering. When he moves closer, Will flinches involuntarily. He places his hand over Will's shoulder; the firm pressure blanks out Will's mind. He screams again, suddenly wanting nothing more than to taste Hannibal's blood in his mouth.

But Hannibal works deftly, moving Will's arm confidently first to untwist it, then to pull it further out in a way that Will recognizes as a necessary step for realigning and popping the shoulder back in. It produces such a bright, throbbing pain though, he briefly considers whether Hannibal might only be trying to incapacitate him further.

The relief he feels when the joint pops back into the socket is immeasurable. He lets out a heavy sigh, and moves to hold his injured arm. Folded in on himself, he must look about as weak as he feels in that moment. It is then that he decides not to try to fight his way out again.

"Ever heard of catching flies with honey?" Will spits out at Hannibal.

He shuffles slowly to create some distance between them. At first, it looks as though Hannibal is going to lunge out to stop him, but he tempers himself. After a tick, he goes over to the freezer to remove an ice pack.

"Expect considerable swelling around the joint," he says, and wraps the ice pack in dish towels. He hands it over to Will. "I can secure your arm in a sling before I leave."

“We’re ignoring this then?” Will looks at Hannibal, half exasperated, half relieved that at least this way, he’s gifted time to think.

It’s not as though this is out of character, or that Will’s deceived himself into thinking he hadn’t be barrelling towards such a fate. There’s a part of him that is eager to reprimand himself for playing along the way he has, for so long and with so little self-preservation. Wonders if, at their second encounter outside the coffee shop, he had missed the chance to extinguish Hannibal’s smoldering need for more. He's not sure he'll get another opportunity, not so easily at least.

But what’s the point of psychological self-flagellation? He’s here, now (*and goddamn, isn't it nice to wonder about the past when you can't change a thing*). He should concentrate on what happens next. He places the ice pack carefully onto his shoulder. The weight of it makes him hiss. He motions to Hannibal that he's ready to listen.

“I have a room ready for you, just upstairs. I had hoped we could have come around to the topic of you staying in a more agreeable fashion.”

A sharp huff makes his whole chest compress on the exhale, which pulls painfully at both the raw wound on his back and his aching shoulder. What a broken thing he is: the packaging is beginning to truthfully advertise what’s inside.

“If I try to leave?” Will asks, skipping over questions that seem less critical now, like ‘*What do you mean ‘a room’?’* or *‘When the fuck did you think to mention you never wanted me to leave?’* or ‘*What in holy hell is going on here?'*

Hannibal’s lip twitches nearly imperceptibly, as though the thought makes his stomach sour. He blinks. His voice doesn’t waver we he answers, “I will kill you.”

Will grits his teeth. It isn’t the words that unsettle him as much as it is the honesty with which Hannibal says them. He nods slowly.

“And if I stay?”

He doesn’t move his eyes away from Hannibal’s own, but he thinks out of the corner of his eye he senses a glitch in the stillness of the room, as though Hannibal had started fidgeting. It makes his stomach drop; he doesn’t need to hear whatever answer he's considering.

Hannibal’s voice softens. “I don’t think I want to kill you, Will.”

Okay.

So.

What? What now? He doesn’t close his eyes to shut out the world and process Hannibal’s answer like he wants to; it is impossible for him to look away. He watches the overwhelming flow of emotion behind Hannibal’s still face, how it strains with the effort of holding it back. He doesn’t need some fucking empathy disorder to hurt the way Hannibal is hurting now.

And he hates that, just how much Hannibal has invested in the idea of him. How he is willing to kill in order to keep Will for himself.

How, inevitably, he is going to realize he's made a mistake; that he's erroneously put his faith in whatever he believes Will might be. That, he hates the most: how Hannibal's devotion makes him feel utterly unworthy.

He takes a deep, shaky breath. Combs his hand through his dirty hair. "Alright. Show me the room."

Chapter 12

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The door's lock shines in polished chrome and matches nothing else in the home except another on the door across the hall. Inside, the room is unremarkable. Will wasn't sure what he was expecting, or if he'd even managed to imagine anything at all.

Hannibal lets him in. He keeps the door open but for a time remains where he entered, his body a solid barrier between Will and escape. As if awakened from a reverie, he snaps back to action and goes to the small closet to retrieve a large first aid kit.

“Was it your intention to unnerve me with the size of that kit?” Will asks, motioning with his head toward the spread that Hannibal has opened and is shuffling through to find new bandages and a sling.

Hannibal doesn't answer, not that Will expected him to. It was a genuine question though. Will's head is foggy and he'd really like some straight answers. He needs to start picking out the nuances in what type of killer he's been taunting, but… maybe not right this second. Hannibal will be at the hospital for a few hours at least.

It’s with little emotion that he registers how, even now, Will isn’t prioritizing his own safety. In his defense, he's sore and he needs to lay down. And, if he's being honest, a part of him is curious about what it will take to realign his short-term goals with one that keeps him out of long-term harm.

“It's a relatively straightforward surgery I've been called in for, but if history repeats itself it will be some time before I can get away again.” Hannibal says, casually, but not forcibly so. Will thinks he isn't particularly worried about what Will may or may not do while he's away.

He leans into that a bit, half-heartedly using the time to information-gather. “You don't think I'm going to try to leave,” Will says steadily.

Hannibal runs his tongue over his crooked front teeth. “Will, are you going to try to leave?” he asks.

Will lets out a rumbling groan from deep in his throat as Hannibal maneuvers him out of his shirt so he might see to the ripped-off bandages. He carefully peels the remaining tape off from around the wound; his touch is purposively light, as though it might detract from how he mishandled Will only moments before.

“No, I’m not leaving,” Will admits, and closes his eyes to avoid catching Hannibal's reaction.

“I appreciate that.”

With the bandages replaced, Hannibal moves around to fold Will's tender arm onto his chest in preparation for the sling. Will can't bring himself to watch him work, but from touch alone he can tell that Hannibal is being more careful than is strictly necessary. He's never felt more contempt for the man than right now.

When the wrap feels secure, Will tentatively relaxes the muscles in his neck and back, testing the sling's ability to hold his arm's weight. He doesn't even trust the goddamn cotton blend. He wants to blame that on Hannibal, but his insecurities have been a long time building.

"That said," Hannibal continues, "I would feel best if you stayed here where you can rest comfortably." He offers his opinion, as though this is a fucking day spa. As though he expects Will to weigh the options and objectively see the value in staying locked up for god knows how long.

Will takes in the space properly, noticing the small but full ensuite through a corner door, even a mini-fridge he expects has been stocked since before he first arrived, several days ago. He shrugs, refusing to commit one way or another but knowing Hannibal will take that as acquiescence.

Hannibal leaves out two pills - only ibuprofen, he would wager - and tidies up the rest of the first aid kit to take with him. It's then that Will notices the room seems suspiciously lacking in sharp objects: rounded corners on dressers and tables, a plastic pitcher and cups atop the mini-fridge, the decor mostly greenery and soft canvases draped on the walls. He bets there's nothing in the bathroom to shave with, either, not that he gives one fuck about his appearance right now.

He gives Hannibal a chilled look. "Afraid I'm going to be a danger to myself while you're gone, Hannibal?" he asks, the venom coating his tongue, making him curl his lips up in disgust.

Hannibal looks as though he is about to smile - a true, genuine smile - but keeps a straight face for Will's sake.

"A series of coincidences, nothing more," he says, then pointedly puts the first aid kit down and pulls out the full bottle of painkillers, followed by two pairs of scissors, tweezers and packets of pre-threaded suture needles. One by one, he arranges the items on the nearby dresser, then waves his hand at the display.

"I hope you get some rest. I'll be back as soon as I can," he says, then steps out of the door and shuts it behind him. The heavy-duty lock - ridiculous when installed on what Will imagines are the house's original cypress doors and worn hinges - slides and clicks loudly before Hannibal's footsteps move away and across the hall.

Will looks at the pills on the bedside table, then moves to take stock of what's left in the rest of the bottle. He runs his fingers along the curved edge of the dresser, just beside the scissors.

Coincidences.

Carefully, agonizingly carefully, he strips out of his pants and shimmies into the turned-down bed. It takes a few minutes to find a position where he can lay without putting too much pressure on his shoulder or the raw square on his back. Once he does though, he's asleep in minutes.

As expected, Hannibal gets drawn into another consultation and then a second relatively minor surgery after he finishes what he was called in for. It's approaching dinner time now and he is eager to get back to the house.

To see Will, yes of course. Though admittedly, he isn't especially concerned about what he'll come home to. With his new injury and lack of rest the night before, Will may have actually succumbed to sleep for a time. Perhaps it's naive of him to trust Will's word when he says he doesn't plan to leave, or perhaps he's playing a little fast and loose because something in him wants to hunt Will down, for real. He's betting on Will to behave a certain way. Generally speaking, he's a decent judge of character.

It'll be good to see him, Hannibal thinks. Maybe not right away, but he's hopeful that this too shall pass. He still has a meal to prepare for Will, after all.

In truth, his concern is primarily for Mr. Pines. He checked on him quickly before leaving but with Will's arrival, he has been less attentive than he should have been to the other man's needs. It seems that at some point in the last 24 hours, Mr. Pines has developed a fever. He'd like to see to him, and soon. He wonders if the creaking fourth stair on the way up will behave for him so that he might slip in there first without alerting Will to his arrival home.

Even so, he takes him time returning back to the house. The wines he has on hand don't quite suit the recipes he's planning, and every detail will be important in calming any of Will's residual anger.

Hours. Fucking hours he's been here. There isn't a clock - of course there isn't a clock - but regardless of how long he may have slept, he's been awake and staring at the coffered ceiling's white-on-cream paint job for literally hours. Hannibal didn't deign it necessary to leave him with anything to do.

He's been weighing information since he woke up. On the one hand, the dresser is filled with clothing. The pants he's borrowed are the same measurements as the ones in the drawer, but the style strikes Will as just a spot too casual for Hannibal. If these were tailored to him - which is a good guess, judging by the fit of what he has been wearing - then Hannibal must have started the collection of items some time ago. A conflicted feeling comes over him as he imagines himself splayed across his own bed as Hannibal dutifully noted the length of his inseam.

So, that doesn't bode well. But then again, there isn't anything else in this room. Beyond its aesthetics, the lack of attention to the room's utility suggests there's a chance he's not going to be stuck here forever. Not yet, at least. Again, he doesn't really know how to feel about that.

His shoulder aches.

In the small fridge, plenty of water, but little in the way of food. Perhaps another good sign, though he supposes it could also be an exceptionally bad one, too.

He hears the creak and swing of the heavy front door plainly through the old house, and begins to strain his ears to listen in. The bastard doesn't come up to unlock the room first, though god knows where he heads to. Will has half a mind to start smashing his good shoulder against the bedroom door, to start shouting at the top of his lungs. Maybe that'll shift Hannibal's priorities and get him up here sooner.

He stays quiet though, because it feels like he's supposed to. Hannibal hasn't made the slightest noise since coming in, and it's quiet for so long that Will begins to wonder if maybe he imagined the sound of the door in the first place.

It's a bad sign if he's experiencing auditory hallucinations after only a few hours. Though then again, if he includes his slips - Donders' body, the stream, every murder he's been assigned for the last two year - he supposes he's been dealing with symptoms of psychosis for much longer than that. That's what the medical community would call it, anyway.

The click and slide of the bedroom's lock happens without any warning; Will is on his feet, heart pounding before the door starts to swing open.

"Jesus. You're a goddamn cat," Will says, settling only marginally when Hannibal doesn't close the door behind him.

"How are you feeling, Will?"

It's a loaded question that he doesn't know how to start to answer. Mostly his head swims with profanities. His eyes catch on the subtle steady pulse visible just below Hannibal's jawline.

"I've felt better." He stares pointedly at Hannibal. "What happens now?"

Annoyance flashes across Hannibal's face before it is replaced with the memory of fondness. "I believe I owe you a meal?"

There's a beat between when Hannibal stops speaking and before Will reacts. It's in this in-between moment where Will nearly falls into *something* genuine. Some hesitancy, some deep emotion that Hannibal is working through, trying to make sense of. It's taking up his resources, and for a second, the outside slips, just a tiny bit. Just enough for Will to feel dizzy by the implications.

It’s a familiar wanting. An undervalued feeling that Will has been doping himself out of experiencing for a long time. As a consequence, he doesn't recognize the loneliness for what it is.

There’s been little conversation between them as Hannibal worked. At first, Will's anger twisted his tongue and made him indeterminate of where to begin his questioning. He had looked outside, at the private garden, once a cloistered, peaceful space that had felt intimately their own. He decided, quite suddenly, that he needed to test whether the outside was still for him, or if Hannibal’s possessiveness had effectively sequestered him to the home's interior rooms.

“Can I set the table?” Will asks out of nowhere, his head still turned to the greenery just beyond the glass.

Hannibal smiles as he chops. “There’s wine decanting in the dining room. Help yourself. I’m content to handle preparations.” Bemusement sparkled in his eyes; Hannibal swung his head to shoo him from inside his kitchen.

Will made sure to leave the kitchen, the dining room, the house at a feigned confident, prowling pace.

Now, the air outside blossoms around him. There isn’t much of a breeze, confined as they are by the tall shrubs, yet Will doesn’t feel anything like he did in that bedroom. The stillness of the air doesn’t imply staleness like it did inside.

For the first time in hours, Will lets his muscles untense.

Some time later when the meal is ready, they again eat outside. Hannibal has made up a varietal meal of tapas; the table is littered with colorful small plates of meats and breads and vegetables. Visually, nothing takes center stage. Each bite or two of flavor is meant to build upon what was consumed previously, Hannibal explains. Together, it creates a crescendo that peaks at his meat.

Will has been made into pinchos morunos - skewed and seasoned with paprika and tumeric and cumin, Will smells. It is to be enjoyed after the muscles with chorizo and parsley, and the croquetas de sobrasada. They will experience a daisy chaining of texture, of flavor that will coalesce into a sum greater than its parts.

Will taps his foot with a nervous energy that makes his mind blank. He can’t consider conversation. Hannibal gratefully allows Will to take in the grandiosity of his meal.

Together, they arrive at the course that has kept his heart racing. He takes the first bite, teeth sliding through the tender cube to let the flavor spread warm and invasive in his mouth.

The whole of his upper back lights up in a sharp, burning sympathetic response. He can feel the sweat growing heavy just under the surface of his skin.

But it’s good, *god* is it so fucking good. Not just the the taste, or the texture, or the smell. Nothing so banal to be limited to perception by the senses. A small offering - he feels the truth in that word, now: he *gave* this gift to them tonight - that fills in him a sense of righteousness he immediately recognizes as deadly.

Hannibal watches Will, eyes locked on his mouth, then his throat, across his neck to settle on the rush of blood from head to heart and back again.

It’s just so fucking good.

Once Will finishes his piece, and only when he’s reached for his glass to complement the intoxication that courses through him: that’s when Hannibal takes his own bite.

The taste is rather innocuous and yet undeniably human. A wave of pleasure surges through Hannibal. He closes his eyes and tries to commit what he’s just experienced - seen, tasted, felt - to memory so that he might be able to draw on it again and again and again for decades to come.

It’s never been this satisfying, and Will isn’t even dead. A companion, a new goal, a formidable ally even. A dinner guest. His stomach clenches at the possibilities.

When they retire into the house, Will walks straight to the master bedroom. Hannibal’s lips quirk. He feels the spreading warmth of affectionate respect.

Will lays on his good shoulder, facing Hannibal's side of the bed. His eyes flit uncertainly from place to space to place. It reminds Hannibal of the frenzied dance of bees, altering the hive of a new danger.

“I’m trying to understand why you are acting this way: fighting me, locking me up, letting me wander in the garden with some superficial freedom. It’s either you mean to mock my resolute sense of free-will in the face of your influence. Or…” Will trails off.

Hannibal slips into bed beside Will.

“Or?”

“You’re really this hyper-possessive, overconfident loser whose moral compass is guided only by a psychopathic certainty that the world owes him whatever which he can take from it.”

If Will expects to provoke a reaction, he’s disappointed. “I see no reason, from a logical perspective, why both of these statements cannot be true at once. Or, to drive the point home, both inaccurate.”

Will hums at that. He flexes and relaxes the muscles in his chest and back experimentally, relieved that the wrong twinge brings on a flash of agonizing pain. The meds and wine must

be working if he's already teasing himself, craving another distraction. Or he's getting worse. Both of these statements could be true at once.

"You're right of course - they are not mutually exclusive nor exhaustive options. But something tells me it's one or the other with you." Will throws back.

Hannibal breathes out, a bit annoyed. Surely Will understands his need for discretion. "I hoped you would forgive my desire for security. Though I believe I have grown to understand you in a way not many have been privileged, it is prudent of me to take some precautions with you."

He focuses to realign his features, recapture a sliver of the fleeting pride he'd felt only moments before. He finds it easy to pull out things that captivate him, beyond Will's rudeness.

"Are you regretting your confession, before? Did the meal not live up to your expectations?" he asks, outlining the curve of Will's ear with his finger. Will blinks back a shiver.

"No, you know that isn't it."

"I had hoped." Hannibal gives him an adoring smile. "There are certain impulses, certain hedonistic desires that we deny ourselves out of an inherited understanding of unbreachable taboo. But the world is shadowed in greys, not etched in harsh black and white."

Will doesn't answer, but scrunches his brows to reject Hannibal's simple justification.

"I have time tomorrow, before work. Why not rest now, and if you still feel as though you are being held against your will-"

"You *locked* me inside a pre-made safe room." Will cuts in, incredulous.

He doesn't miss a beat with his rephrase: "- if tomorrow you do not want to stay, we can discuss it."

Will doesn't bother to hide his skepticism that any such thing will take place tomorrow, but doesn't argue.

They're silent for a long time, long enough that he thinks Will may have slipped off to sleep. He takes back his hand from Will's ear and shuffles himself under the covers. There's a sharp inhale beside him before Will speaks, "Do you have something to make me sleep?"

Arousal swells low in his groin. Sweeping the blankets off, he heads for the bathroom cabinet. He considers the options, weighs length of sedation against short and long term side effects. He takes down two bottles from the top shelf and brings them both back to bed.

Will has shifted up onto his good shoulder again, a pained grimace hidden in the room's shadows.

"It was delicious," Will admits to Hannibal's empty place in the bed.

“Was it sufficient?” he asks, still undecided between the two alternatives he holds in his hands.

“No.” Will sounds disappointed.

He climbs in to sit beside Will, then leans across the bedside table for a water glass. He palms three blue liquid pills and leaves the other container unopened. Will takes the proffered items and gives a weak nod in thanks.

“Good.” he says, then leans over to place a chaste kiss upon Will’s forehead.

Chapter End Notes

this chapter made me hungry.

Chapter 13

Chapter Notes

> tw for dub-con/non-con. surprise, hannibal acts selfishly towards will, regardless of explicit consent

Will is out within ten minutes. He barely moves throughout the night, though Hannibal attributes it at least in part to the building exhaustion and not wholly due to the sedative. Hannibal rises early to exercise and prepare a small breakfast. When he comes back to his room, sweat still shines along his neck, long trails of it drying slowly along his back. Will sleeps soundly on his stomach, head skewed awkwardly to the side, face half buried in the pillows.

Hannibal takes the blanket off and folds it neatly at the end of the bed. He lets his lounge pants drop in a pool at his feat, followed by his underwear. Will stirs only when Hannibal begins to tug clinically at the hem of his boxers. Will pushes himself up a fraction before his one arm collapses and he makes a garbled groan-whine in protest.

Unperturbed, Hannibal removes the boxers and drags his clawed fingers up Will's legs, starting at the swell of his calves, to his thighs, eventually coming to dig into his ass. He parts his cheeks to watch them slap back, to feel the muscles below his hands clench momentarily in half-hearted argument.

"Hips up," he commands, stuffing his pillows under Will to tilt him into a better position. A frown etches deeply across Will's mouth as he allows himself to be maneuvered.

He crawls onto the bed and pulls Will's cheeks wide again, so he might nuzzle his cheek between the halves. Will's skin is clean, warm, inviting. To Hannibal's sensitive nose, the musky scent overwhelms; he rubs the back of his hand over his growing cock and lets a heavy exhale fall over the pink pucker before him.

Sometimes it feels as though there is a vile gravity pulling him to act the way he does. Something collectively more than himself, but one whose origin he has been hesitant to ascribe to anyone - anything - else. Regardless of its inception, psychological or spiritual, what he's certain of are only his immediate needs. Those, and his ability to navigate whatever consequences they beset him.

He swipes his tongue flat across Will's asshole and continues the trail up past the dimples in his lower back. He tastes of dried fear, anger, salt; it makes Hannibal's mind float pleasantly in his skull. He goes back down and does it again.

"Hrmm, n- Hannahbuhl-" Will slurs into the pillow, brows creased dramatically. "St-stoop"

He doesn't acknowledge Will's reaction, so caught up is he in his current pursuits. He'd given ample opportunity to lay out boundaries, and was rejected each time. Stop isn't a particularly creative safeword, anyway. Deep in his stomach, he feels a tension unfurl as he presses his tongue in.

Still pulling his cheeks wide, he teases Will by laping sloppy licks over his hole. Will lets out a quiet surprised moan as he fastens his lips over him and sucks the edges of his rim up into the wet heat of his mouth. His tongue slips into Will's loosening opening, curls up and presses from the base of the muscle to push it deeper still. Inside, the pressure around his tongue feels clamp-like, then more like a vacuum unwilling to let him go. When at last he pulls cleanly out, Will lets loose a dissolute noise.

"That's right," Hannibal says, then spits a thick glob onto the pink hole. He rubs a finger through the wetness and probes shallowly in before he spits again, adding just enough to take the rough edge off him forcing two fingers to the webbing. Will clamps down hard around them, before relaxing nearly entirely into a sprawled slump across the bed. Considering how dozy he must still feel, he imagines this as Will's version of enthusiastic consent.

Hannibal keeps his face close by, his eyes locked on the way Will body sucks on his fingers when he tries to pull it all the way out. So he doesn't, eventually working another in beside the first two, reveling in press coming from every direction.

With Will, more than with other bedmates, there is an urge to push in further and further until the mess he'll inevitably split open will blur the lines between himself and other. He settles, for now, with pulling somnolent whines each time he hooks and twists himself inside Will.

With his other hand, he paws at the bare skin of Will's back until he bumps up against the bandage's edge. He'd like to rip it off, press his tongue against the crusting edges, feel the battery acid raw taste of his muscle. He picks up his pace, spreading his fingers wide now and again to a battering of helpless moans.

Then, very suddenly, he stops. Pulls nearly out and parts his fingers as wide as the young muscle will allow. Enough to get two fingers from each hand in, hooked on either side to pull more lewd and harried noises from Will.

He spits again, rubs Will's rim between fingers and thumb, always stretching a little faster than the body is willing to accomodate. When there's space, he shoves his tongue deep into the small gape to lick mercilessly at the tenderness inside. Here, Will is smooth and hot and throbbing; Hannibal wonders if he might be able to keep him just like this for hours - wide and ready whenever the mood overwhelms him again to invade.

Quickly, he rips out his fingers from either side of his tongue, and Will breathes out something profane. Hannibal is quick to agree; he lets slip his adoration when the muscles of Will's hole stay agape and loose around his tongue - only for a second - before contracting back so that he may fuck into the tight heat again.

"Hrmm *yes,*" Will commends, giving an encouraging push back against Hannibal's face.

His reaction is entirely too forward for what Hannibal has a taste for; he rakes his hand up, just past the edge of the tape and gives one, two sharp padded smacks where Will feels everything the most. That does it - Will whimpers, bucks back and twists away from his cruelty before softening back into his original position.

Hannibal smiles, catches Will's rim against the edge of his teeth before continuing to move down so he might bury his mouth into the thin fleshy space before his balls, lick in hard and harder until Will makes a gasping, frustrated noise to say he's hitting a spot that would feel so much better from the inside. If he could pull him apart to expose him so indecently without consequence, he would certainly be painted in red by now.

Will's whining becomes more insistent, his stillness more forced until he cannot help from making small, thrusting motions with his hips. The air in the room is thick, too hot for so early in the morning. It makes it easier to forget where he ends and Will begins.

"I wouldn't waste a morsel of you," Hannibal promises and makes Will pant louder. He rubs his tongue ungently over the seam on his balls and down the exposed backside of his trapped cock. He chuckles enthusiastically as slick slides out from the tip to coat his tongue.

He lets saliva drip sloppily onto his fingers and slides them easily back in, rubbing along the walls until he feels the firmer mass beneath. If at the same time he buries his face into Will's perineum and pushes down roughly from inside, he can imagine that he could feel his prostate indirectly over his tongue. Maybe if he pushed hard enough, dug in, *twisted*, he might rip the delicate urethra and force it down to rest onto the mass of muscle that twitches and quivers in his mouth. He imagines it, but keeps his urges gentled, and for now, focuses receiving his delight from the noises Will begins to make as he forgoes feigning sleep and encourages Hannibal on the only way he's allowed.

When Will comes, it's in multiple long, spurting bursts that don't relent until Hannibal pulls his mouth back from the sensitive area and begins to lick at the mess. To have Will inside him - to taste any part of him - this is a wonder that gildes the edges of what is quickly becoming his charmed life.

Will makes a soft noise as he comes down from his high and shifts as though he means to turn and sit up.

"Don't move," Hannibal admonishes, grasping first one tricep and then the other as he climbs up to reposition himself. "I'm not done."

By this point, he is achingly hard: his purple-red cock head shoots out from his body, glistening with slick. Hannibal ruts himself along the curve of Will's ass, a low grunt coming from finally turning his attention towards his own needs. He shifts his hand palm up before Will's turned face.

"Spit," he demands and Will does. "Again." He obeys.

Rubbed over himself, he lines up and pushes in. His thrusts are sharp, insensitive of Will's used state, only mindful of what pleasure he can bring himself now within the quivering depths of the body below.

“I’d make you come,” he promises with a rough voice muffles behind gritted teeth. “Before I kill you. I’d make you come until you writhed from the pained pleasure of it.” He fucks in harder. “Tempers the stronger flavours in the meat.”

Will hisses out a reply, eyes pressed tight against the onslaught of stimulation he is unwilling to fight against.

“You’d like that, wouldn’t you?” Hannibal asks, pausing to demand an answer from the near-unintelligible lump below him.

Will shimmies his ass against Hannibal’s cock, unwilling to indulge in a reprieve. “I - I don’t know. I don’t know what I want,” he answers finally. His voice nearly cracks with the emotion.

Hannibal takes pity on him and stays quiet while he works into him for several minutes longer. His orgasm draws a shudder through him; he comes with a low approving moan, pulsing shot after shot into the hot body below. Sweatier than when he came in, heart throbbing, he slides out and flips over onto his back beside Will.

The room quiets slowly as they both catch their breath. The air is stifling until it shifts and the gooseflesh raises up over Hannibal’s arms. Will must feel it too; he carefully slides himself under the covers again and holds them up for Hannibal to do the same.

“You said we’d talk about it in the morning,” Will reminds him.

“If you still wanted to leave, yes.”

Hannibal reaches an arm out to rest over Will’s flank, which feels clammy with cooling sweat.

“Do you still want to leave?” Hannibal asks.

“I’d like to believe I have the option.”

“You always have the option.”

“Just like you always have the option to kill me?” Will asks.

“I’m not naïve enough to claim that option as belonging exclusively to me.”

Will laughs at that, a short but light sound in the quiet of the room. It brings a warm smile to the edges of Hannibal's lips in turn.

“I’m not going back in that room, Hannibal.” Will says, suddenly serious again.

The direct refusal touches a nerve in Hannibal that might, if he were a lesser man, trigger a rash reaction. He reminds himself that he got Will here once, it wouldn’t be altogether that difficult to do it again. Should circumstances demand it. Besides, he wants to believe that he will stay of his own accord.

“Okay,” Hannibal agrees.

Will is quiet, seemingly waiting for him to continue. When he doesn’t, he parrots back, “Okay.” followed by “Thank you.”

He slides his hand over Will’s ass and cups his cheek before dipping his fingers across the wet mess leaking from his hole. He slides his fingers about for a time, a instinctual calm settling over him from feeling his claim over another. Hannibal gently pushes Will’s leg wider apart so that he might circle is finger over his rim, dipping a fingernail’s depth in to force more come out. Will squeezes around him and pulls his leg further up.

He crooks his fingers and brings them up, towards Will’s mouth. Their gaze locked, both of them dare the other to move first until Will tilts his chin up and slips his tongue out to lap over the pearly wet. Will smiles, first tentative, and then without restraint.

“Let me clean you,” Hannibal offers, leaning forward to press lips softly against Will’s own. “I’d like to show you something, after.”

Once dressed, Will stands beside Hannibal in the upstairs hallway, unsurprised that they have stopped before the other locked door.

“What are you expecting to happen here?” he asks.

Throughout the shower, as they'd dressed, he’s felt a growing anxiety about whatever it is he is about to see. Not necessarily about what it will be. About what reaction Hannibal is anticipating from him. He is untethered; it is impossible to imagine that Hannibal knows him well enough to predict his reaction when he cannot even fathom how to ready himself.

“It would be dishonest to deny that I am eager to involve you in my life, however brief that involvement may end up being.” The stern look Hannibal gives him, it’s the equivalent of holding his hand to stop short any sort of argument. “I have done a fair amount of… renegotiating my priorities during my time in this city. I return to Baltimore soon, and I didn’t expect to feel as conflicted about it as I do.”

Will does interrupt this time, scornful look be damned. “We don’t know one another, Hannibal. We’re strangers. Enticing as that may be.”

Hannibal tsks away Will's interjection. “Despite your refusal, I believe you see me better than few ever have.” Hannibal pauses there, as though he expects Will to argue. When he doesn’t, his eyes crinkle with satisfaction. “I suspect I’m learning you in turn. Though I wish we had more time, in any case I’ve come to understand that what happens next is an inevitability.”

“What happens next, Hannibal?” Will warns, taking a small step into the man beside him. He can’t look away from the door. His fingers twitch, looking for something to hold on to. He

shoves them into his pockets instead.

“That is your decision,” Hannibal says, then moves to unlock the bedroom door.

Chapter 14

The room is bright. Hotter than any on the other side of the house. For a moment, the beams of light transform the room into a bleached empty space. He steps towards the open doorway, squinting into the gleam.

He doesn't immediately recognize the body dozing in the bed. The shock of red hair pulls at something familiar but indistinct. His knuckles itch, his mouth waters. Then he remembers.

The redhead's face is green and yellow and various shades of drying, crusted red. There's swelling that leaks past the bandages on his neck. The air smells a bit more sour, and bit staler than out in the hallway. Infected.

Under his lids, the redhead's eyes whip back and forth in frenzied dreaming. He could walk over there, press his thumbs down over the spheres, push past their buoyant resistance until he feels them burst. He'd hear the pop, that wet sound would travel up his arms in wave after wave of impulse. Shocking. It would be shocking for the redhead. But he'd never have to really wake up again. Not if he kept pushing. Push into the sockets, hear the crackling of the fragile bones break into the bottom of his prefrontal cortex. They'd embed in the white matter, the edges would twist into the sulci and soon, he would be dead.

It wouldn't be gunshot-to-the-head quick, but he'd make sure it was as effective.

He could do this.

He senses, from just behind him, the humming curious energy coming off of Hannibal. To see if he *will* do this. Or something similar.

The smell of curdled milk pulls into his nostrils, sags down into his throat. He'll never forget this smell. Killing the redhead won't serve to erase that smell. With it, this memory will be seared into the meat of his mind, will threaten to slip out decades later, always in the most inopportune times.

"Can I get you anything?" Hannibal asks, always considerate.

Will closes his eyes, but it doesn't do any good: the memory of the redhead's skin looks as sallow and jaundiced as reality. His hands come up to press against his own eyes, hard enough to see stars white out the scene before him, leaving only bursts that race in from his periphery.

Hannibal's hand comes to rest on his shoulder and *dammit*, it feels good to have him close. If only it were a slightly stronger pressure: Will would gladly fall to his knees to absolve himself of the obvious decision before him.

Sometimes, there's mercy in murder, he reminds himself. It doesn't *matter* if that mercy would also bring a sickening pleasure to the executioner. It would remain a mercy. He sees it plainly before him: Hannibal has delivered him up such an option. It wouldn't even need to

be gruesome - he could play the martyr and sacrifice his rapture to make it quick. It'd take maybe a triple dose - better make it quadruple - of whatever sedative Hannibal has him on. There would be a span of a few minutes before it would start to take effect. Hannibal (not him, *not* him) could revel in several seconds of the redhead's growing, helpless panic. Then, they could watch when that jolting emergency signal shoots from the sudden stuttering stop to the heart's ever present beating - redhead would become aware of it before the drugs made him indifferent to his own death. There would be that moment - however short - where they could watch a tremulous twitch run over his face.

He could do that. He could.

He understands, at least a little better, what Hannibal is expecting. And he wants to. *Fuck*, does he want to. But more than anything - more than lecherous desire, more than mercy - he can't give Hannibal the satisfaction of his becoming. It feels unearned. Premature.

Besides, what a waste. The meat is spoiled, now.

Will wheels around to face Hannibal. His face is twisted in anger.

"He's dead no matter what I do, isn't he?"

Hannibal gives a small nod. "The infection is subsiding. I suspect he would be suitable in a few days."

They can feast, if he so chooses. Hannibal has set before him an undeniable choice, along with an optional waiting period.

He has several days where he might save redhead. Might save both of them. Save the rest of humanity from Hannibal. From the both of them.

He walks closer to the redhead, his hand coming to rest on the edge of a wheeled cart of bandages and medicines and other miscellaneous medical supplies. When he notices the shears, half-hidden under the roll of gauze, his fingers twitch.

"And if I kill him sooner? Right now?" he asks, tearing his eyes away from Hannibal to look at the man whose fate they cradle in their talons.

"I would consider it a waste of a great opportunity."

Hannibal moves to stand just behind him. The hairs at his nape prickle in response to the feel of his warm breath. Hannibal's grasp around his bicep is gentle. Protective.

"I have a twelve hour shift that I need to leave for shortly." Hannibal says, as though he's about to follow with plans to grab drinks after. "In his state, Mr. Pines would suffer from me being gone that long."

Will tries is damnedest not to let the inhale he takes sound too shocked nor too haggard. He can hear Hannibal's foreign tongue curve about the words before Hannibal even opens his mouth: "His care is straightforward. I could show you what he'll need, before I leave."

The skin stretches over his knuckles as he tenses. The cart almost shakes. He begins to slowly count, makes it to seven before he notices the way the light jumps off Hannibal's bright eyes. The slight amused crinkle at their edge.

Fuck you, he thinks before he says it. "Fuck you."

And then, "Your image is coming into focus more and more. It's -" he pauses, selecting the most effective ending to the thought. He decides to go with honesty. "- uncomfortable being the centre of your attention."

"Discomfort can precede transformation," Hannibal offers, smiling.

He sighs, and head dips to acknowledge Hannibal.

Will spends the next forty-five minutes staring at '*Mr. Pines'* from the overstuffed wingback chair in the corner. His right foot is numb, promises an itching demanding pain when he finally moves.

He makes himself stand and goes over to the bedside. The redhead is barely conscious, his eyelids more closed than open, his eyes rolled up, the muscles giving up again and again to keep the orbits aligned.

"You're here because of me," Will begins, speaking out loud as much for his own benefit as for the redhead's. "I've drawn him to you, and you're not going to leave."

Redhead's nostrils flare, his eyelids lazily pull up a fraction as he tries to lift them from the brow.

"He wants me to kill you, but not yet. I'm not sure I'm going to do it." He isn't uncertain of whether he could do it - there's no moral unrest holding him back. Not as it concerns murder, at least. It's bigger than one man's life. It's what it would mean for his personal line in the sand. If he killed the redhead -

"If I kill you, the whole line gets washed away." His eyes are wet. "If I kill you, I think I'll feel something that I won't want to stop. And it's not even that. *Fuck*, it's not even that."

Will stops and leans into Mr. Pines' space. Pines has his eyes open but unfocused, aimed towards his remaining foot. He's obviously crying. It streaks through some of the chipping blood. Will finds he doesn't feel anything at all, watching this.

"Can someone so hateful ever experience anything uncorrupted by that feeling? What does the rest of life look like when those around you become no better than pigs?"

He doesn't know.

Will sees her first as she exits the building and breaks from the others to head to her car. She's worn thin from overwork, the skin under her eyes sagging from too many late nights. It was a shit thing to do, leaving her without warning. As if he had a say in the matter.

You could have left days ago, he reminds himself, but what's the point? He doesn't bother dwelling on the past any more than he needs to.

He's waiting on the passenger side once she rounds the corner and sees him.

"Jesus, Graham! Where the fuck- does that mean - are you alright?!" Thompson stumbles over herself, several thoughts competing to get past her lips first. She looks concerned, sure, but worn thin. Not even trying to hide her annoyance for her partner.

Will holds up a hand to quiet her. "I'll tell you, just - not here. Can we go back to your place?"

His voice wavers in the middle, which serves to erase any negativity from his partner. She looks at him like a stray. At her core, Thompson is a good person. It'll be her undoing, one day. It's not a trait that keeps in cops for long.

She nods, unlocks the car, and they both get in.

Fifteen hours later, he watches Hannibal slide his Bentley to park in front of his house. Will is sitting on his covered porch, changed but looking tired. He shifts his gaze away from the car, back to his drink and finishes it off.

Hannibal keeps his pace steady as he walks to meet Will. When he looks up, Hannibal visibly softens.

"I'm glad to have found you here," says Hannibal. As he passes by Will he falters, for no more than a fraction of a second, then continues to sit down in the rocker beside him. The street is empty; the hour too late for any more evening strolls or dog walkers. There's only the sounds of urban wildlife, the occasional rustle of branches. The wind is light.

It feels a bit like he's banished them to a mirror world. Everything is the same except for what absolutely isn't.

"I didn't kill him," he says.

"No. You changed his dressings, replaced his fluids, and made a mess of my study."

Will lets out a tired chuckle. "I assumed you had my phone with you, but I had to look anyway." He pauses, turning to look towards Hannibal. "I wanted to. I very nearly killed him, Hannibal."

Hannibal nods as though everything he's done was perfectly predictable.

"I appreciate the self-control." He moves to cover Will's hand with his own, a gesture that might feel like a signal of ownership, except for the tender way Hannibal's fingers twitch and tap a light beat onto his flesh. At first, he'd read Hannibal as his usual cocksure self, but this is the closest Will has seen him come to fidgeting.

Is he *nervous?*

If he is, his voice doesn't betray him. "The opportunity is still available."

He lets his breath come out in a heavy sigh. "I know." And then, "I quit."

This, finally, seems to draw out a hint of surprise. Hannibal's face blanks for a second, but then he recovers with a smile. It's unreserved, shows his teeth.

"Will you walk home with me?" Hannibal asks, and it sounds like a genuine question this time.

By sacrificing his old self, he's become something of an equal in Hannibal's mind now. It's probably a dangerous development, but he can't help mirror the pure happiness Hannibal beams at Will. That is, after all, the main problem here: how good it feels to relish in the future Hannibal has gift wrapped and delivered for him.

The night is finally cooling now that the sun has been down for hours. Hannibal lays curled up beside him in the thick grass in their backyard, his eyes travelling from top to tip and over again and again like he might be able to drink in the sight of Will. Will lays there, unashamed of their nakedness or his audience in it. He feels every blade of grass scratch lightly on his back, swears something has lodged under his bandages, hears the crisp crunch as the grass folds over when he rolls to face Hannibal.

"Have you always been like this?" Will asks, but the question is so much more than about murder and cannibalism. Have you always been this psychotic, sure, but have you always been this magnetic? Have you always been this devoted? Have you always been this alluring?

Hannibal senses the layers behind the question and grins in the way that shows his snaggle teeth that jut like fangs. Will's flesh is covered with their imprints, still red-purple from the way Hannibal had gnawed on any piece of him while he'd been fucked, hard, Will driven by an animal need to prove his dominance over an impossibly slippery partner.

"By asking, who do you hope you'll learn more about - me, or yourself?" Hannibal swerves; Will is growing accustomed to it. He isn't wrong, either: what part of him wants to know that this was something rotten in him, from the beginning, unavoidable, unstoppable? If Hannibal was born bloodthirsty, then he could conceivably argue for nature on his behalf as well.

Will's hand moves to snake around Hannibal. He pulls on him from the waist, closing the small distance between them until he can feel the heat radiating from his cooling skin.

"Just answer the question," he teases, his lips drawn up in a soft smile.

"I don't know," Hannibal begins, lifting his chin and brows to stop Will from interrupting. "I had a sister once. If circumstances had been different - if she'd survived I mean - I don't know how I would have manifest. Something died with her, but whether that something would have prevented me from becoming what I am - that's not a question I dwell on much anymore."

"What happened?" Will asks, his voice quiet.

“Nothing good.” Hannibal says simply, looking through Will and back into his painful past.

Hannibal snaps himself out of it with the slightest start, then leans into Will so that their lips just barely touch, their breath hot on their teeth. His tongue darts out, tasting Will’s swollen skin. A devious smile tugs his lips tight. “I ate her.”

Chapter 15

Chapter Notes

here be gore.

The way the moon glints on the water, it looks at though it glows from within, some bio-luminescent creature shifting and swirling about the branches at the bank. The way the light shines, it makes it easy to discriminate the body parts: foot, leg, head, thigh. On and on. About him, wading waist deep in the frigid cold of the new spring, he must have watched a dozen cumulative bodies float by. Or the same body, a dozen times. That's it, he knows. Red-head's bandages have come loose and no matter how it bobs down the river, the head'll always lazily turn as it approaches. He sees the mutilated place where his jaw used to be, over and over again. The water is clear, shining, and he sees what isn't there: no lips, no tongue, no teeth. Just pink muscle that he tells himself can't possibly still twitch, this long after butchering.

When he wakes, he's sitting in the overstuffed chair with the red-head, who seems less sickly but also less alive with every day that passes. Grown weary, perhaps.

Hannibal told him: today it would be okay to start the harvest.

He'd slipped out of bed, sure that Hannibal was alert and carefully breathing just a bit lighter so as to hear everything he could as he retreated from the room. He can imagine him like a dog, ears perked up, playing coy while keenly sensing for any change. When the door to red-head's room clicked open, he'd pictured Hannibal making a satisfied snuffling noise, shifting in his bed and drifting easily back to sleep now that he knew where Will had gone.

Three days. It'd been three more days here. Hannibal hadn't carved any more pieces from Will, but their dinners had grown more exotic, without pretense for what was on the plate. When he let himself think at all about what he was eating, he used to be struck with a moment of utter panic. It would race through him, shock him so sufficiently, he would immediately turn away from the thought. It was remarkable how quickly - only three days - he had been able to stop thinking about it at all.

That said, it doesn't sit well with him that red-head is well enough to be on their next menu. He'd like to pretend it is the act itself that is bothering him. In truth, he has grown so disdainful of the body before him, it feels a bit like an insult that this should be Hannibal's idea of a grand gesture.

His fingers play idly with the cell phone. He'd brought it with him, after going to see Thompson. If Hannibal knows he has it, he isn't saying anything. The battery barely has enough juice to start up - it would be useless if he really wants to call anyone. Having the

smooth weight of it in his hands though, being able to flip the cover open and shut without thought, that helps to calm the welling of emotion that is beginning to seep out between his cracks.

Standing up, he walks over to red-head's bed and slips the phone back under the mattress on the side closest to the wall. In the distance, birds are beginning to sing; Hannibal will be in soon to check on them both.

On impulse, he touches the edge of red-head's clean bandages that cover his throat. In one fluid tug, he rips the surgical tape off, exposing a small sewn-up pucker about the width of a credit card. No wet red-pink muscle to gawk at, maybe run his fingers over. The emotion he's been wanting to quell - he identifies it as anger, disappointment, maybe - it leaks out further. He clenches his hand into a fist to stop himself from letting it flow out onto the body before him.

From the bed, a weak pained moan as he wakes to the sting of the ripped-off adhesive. Where the tape had attached, it is already prickling red, warm. Red-head's eyes squeeze shut, his nostrils open wide before he squints through the pain and takes in the man before him.

He's already had his epiphany moment, when he was alert enough during a cleaning that the pieces slid into place and he recognized Will for who he was. He'd struggled some, probably much more fiercely in his mind than in reality, and had kept himself watching Will for the rest of the visit.

By the next day when he came in again, it was as though he'd already forgotten. He suspected that in reality, sometime in the evening between visits, what remained of his hope had flickered out. He'd seen the look before, on some victims they managed to catch just soon enough to have them die in the E.R. instead of on the street. Red-head was going to die today, if not physically by their hands, than in spirit by his own volition.

That annoys him, that he thinks he has a say. He brings the palm of his left hand down awkwardly against the side of red-head's cheek. The man's face whips across the pillow, the skin twisting along the incision line. Through clenched teeth, he makes a low, stuttering coughing noise as he lets his head lull back to center as if by its own accord.

Will slaps him again, tests his dominant arm gingerly and hisses when even a tap shoots pain through his back. Still, he hits him again, and again and over, alternating arms until his flat hand has curled into a weak fist and the knuckles on his left hand split in the same places these bones had cut his right before. Motor memory, he supposes, and then he spits onto the bloodied remain of red-head's face.

Will cradles his injured fist in the other hand, taking note of how hot the undamaged skin feels against the torn cuts. He imagines the way the germs that live upon his skin are latching onto the wounds he cradles, imagines that their passage from one hand to the other is what makes holding burn so much.

Behind him, he hears the door swing open, a short but approving chuckle from the door jam. "Can I make you breakfast first?" Hannibal asks.

“No,” Will says. Hannibal's head buzzes with his voice. “No, I need to do it now.”

Hannibal keeps his voice calm when he asks, “Will you let me watch?”

Will nods, lets his hands fall apart with a hiss. Deep in his belly, his insides shift and twitch in anticipation.

“Thank you.”

Will nods again, but his movements already feel detached, wholly uninterested in communicating with him further. He grows more focused on the body that squirms uncomfortably on the bed.

He sees Will lick his lips. His weight shifts to the balls of his feet, his heels just hovering off the ground. *Restraint*, he reminds himself. *Patience*.

Then, a streak of colour across the white hot of the room. Will’s right arm is flying out, his elbow pulling down and back with the strong muscles still left.

It's a wet crunch of his fist connecting with the curve of cheekbone. He must have overestimated his tolerance; Will immediately howls with the pain that reverberates back from impact, radiating from fist to arm to back. Will reels back, his body unconsciously tensing to brace his injury from any unnecessary jerk. His eyes are bright, wide open, like two gaping mouths thrown back in surprise.

He watches Will do a slow, weird limping walk around the small room.

“If you'd prefer, there are tools in the dresser,” Hannibal says, telling Will that he doesn’t have to be needlessly martyred with the upcoming task.

Will hisses, as though the suggestion itself burns. Still, he walks over and, with his uninjured arm, pulls open the drawer.

After a moment of consideration, he smiles as he watches Will pull out a pair of rib shears, then scalpels upon scalpels. He lets out a soft noise as he readjusts the metal in his arms, working past what must still be intense radiant pain. Hannibal is pleasantly surprised by his strength of will.

Will paces more than walks back to the side of the bed. He’s wrestling with what to do next.

At last, he decides. Their eyes meet, and Hannibal feels hungry, his stomach physically churns when he hears Will ask, “Will you come closer?”

Hannibal breathes out his response. “Yes. Of course.”

Before he does so, he moves to close the door, as though to give them more privacy. He stops just beside Will, who clutches his chosen brushes before the blank canvas. He runs his fingers, briefly, across Will's side.

“What’s better for the meat? Fast or.. not fast?” He asks.

“So recent an infection will have more of an impact on the taste of the meat than the means you choose to use, Will.” He pauses, calculating whether he should continue. “I’ve been experimenting.”

Will hums. His eyes go a little more to the middle distance, he shakes more than he’s used to, and his back straightens ever so slightly so that he might look down on the situation for having this sort of reaction in him. He stands before them, considering.

“Help me get him undressed?” Will asks him suddenly after a bout of silence.

When it’s done, Will curves into Hannibal - just for a blink of the eye before he’s continuing his pivot to throw the clothing onto the chair.

“Just -” Will hesitates, his eyes flicking between him and Mr. Pines. “Tell me if I’m going to kill him, okay?”

His chest contracts suddenly at that, and he nods. His hand moves up to grip Will’s shoulder. For all their indecency up to this point, this movement feels their most intimate. He squeezes the tense muscle below his fingers.

This is for you, now. And *I will cherish this.* And *Don’t disappoint me.* All conveyed through the tips of his fingers.

Will sucks in a breath and then shifts suddenly towards Mr. Pines, who flinches and pulls uselessly on the restraints around his wrists. Will cradles Mr. Pines’ arm so that he can pull the IV’s needle, feel the slide of the metal through vein and out, the barely noticeable change in pressure around the IV.

IV out, the pain will start getting worse shortly. Give him 10 minutes, 15 if his metabolism is still slowed.

Will picks up a discarded scalpel then, adjusts his grip and holds it back like a loaded paintbrush. There is a moment’s hesitation before he leans over, and carefully begins to breach the surface of his skin. Mr. Pines makes a surprised, deep sound and sluggishly moves to look down at his chest.

“Any deeper than that and you risk nicking organs past the ribs. You may prefer to take several, shallower passes at the thickest parts."

Will straightens, listening. His eyes stay on the incision, the bright red that wells up in a two inch long slit. He recalculates then begins again. Overcautious at first, adjusting to the change in relative pressure of the blade under his finger. But then more confidently, creating more gaping wounds. He cuts until he reaches just below the sternum.

His Y-cut is poorly angled, and he realizes too late that he’ll need to make another incision along the edge of the ribs if he wishes to peel back the meat as he intends. As he maps out the cuts, Mr. Pines misattributes his immobility as mercy, growing hopefully silent before again

taking up the groaning, agonizing noises. They vibrate out, their sound weaving in with the light that dilutes the visuals of the room.

In this light, the blood seems at times to sparkle.

As Will has worked, he's backed off, unable to resist taking in a wider view of everything before him. He grips the bed's brass footboard.

When the breast meat is separated from the ribs, Will pauses with the piece still attached just at the top, shielding Mr. Pines from the worst of the view. He waits, as though he's aware that though the blood loss will not get him yet, the shock very well might.

"You have a sense for understanding another's limits," he observes, smiling. Will wipes at his damp forehead with a dirty hand.

Mr. Pines' mouth is open, hollow, unable to let out more than crippled groans. Will pays no attention.

Before he's able to let go of the footboard, Will is holding up the removed pectoral, blood running down to his elbow. Quickly, he snaps to, grabs a large metal tray and offers it to Will, who lays the cut down flat into the tray then immediately returns his attention back to Mr. Pines.

It continues in this fashion, more or less, for another hour. Will sheds his ruined shirt, and his body quickly collects swipes of red streaked through with sweat. He's a hunter, he follows the curves of the muscle, parts layers and then waits, waits so that he doesn't lose Mr. Pines too soon. It's getting difficult to tell if he's still conscious, but the laboured shallow heaving of his chest tells him he's at least still alive.

At last, he has to speak up. "He's close," he says, his voice hoarse.

A shiver runs through Will, his back twitching before he stretches out, cracking out the tension between bones. He looks towards the man's face for what must be the first time since this began. His lip curls up in disdain.

Before them, Mr. Pines is more scraps than person, flesh hanging in heavy yellow and red flaps from chest and humerus and femur. He marvels at the jut of his ribs, the mix of globular fat about white and pink muscle.

Will stares at the exposed breastplate before asking, "Can you help me? Open him up?"

It's relatively easy work to cut a line through the breastplate with his rib shears. The ribs he could remove cleanly with a few more cuts, but instead they work together to make the bones crack and wiggle free. They're discarded into a large basin that Hannibal imagines will work well for marinade.

By the time the lungs have been revealed, the weak thud thud thud of Mr. Pines' heart has ceased. Hannibal realizes he must have missed its last insignificant pulse, too wrapped up

was he in anticipating what task Will might need of him next. He finds he doesn't mind, particularly. The death wasn't the whole point.

Hannibal takes lead in removing the lungs, pulling back the slick, nearly-maroon sacks and heart as one, so that the chest remains as an empty cage. Will had stepped away to give him space to work, but is now back, fingers twitching by their side.

He takes a scalpel and with quick movements, separates the pericardial sac from the lungs. He pierces and slices down the sac, smiling at the sharp breath Will takes in beside him.

Finally. Finally.

The heart is slightly fatty in bits, but mostly red and rigid and so insignificant, seeing it all cut away. *Cor ad cor loquitur*, he thinks, holding the organ for Will to take in hand.

At first, Will's fingers only trace the course of the descending artery which divides the heart very nearly neatly in two at the ventricles.

"Go on, then," he says, placing his wet hand on the slippery curve of Will's back.

Will's fingers close around the muscle, softly at first, testing its firmness. Then he grabs at it preciously, nails making half-moons indents into its surface. He brings the organ up until it rests tenderly against his mouth. So attuned is he, Hannibal imagines he feels the feather-light touch of Will's lips across his own atria.

In his mind, when he created and recreated versions of the scene before him, it was never this beautiful. The brightness of the room gives Will an ethereal quality more suited to heavenly beings than to one as drenched as he is in death. What should look exhausted, weighed down, seems to float before him.

When he finally moves the heart away, seconds, minutes, eons later, it leaves a bright swipe of colour over his lips. He's lost track of how long he's been standing before Will, veneration rendering him impervious to the passing of time.

Will brings the heart down and shifts it from hand to hand, as though calibrating on its true weight. He knows exactly how it feels, its surprising lightness once it empties of blood. But beyond the physical, he can only hope Will feels something akin to what is coursing through him. Wonder. Awe. If it is not identical, then perhaps he shares some complementary response: a deep satisfaction to match his overwhelming pride.

Beauty is evanescent, of course. One moment, he is surrounded by it, nearly overcome by it. Then, like that, it's gone.

Will's lip twitches, and he is solid, whole, impervious once more.

Hannibal remembers this, too. Remembers feeling cheated, the first time he'd been in Will's position. All the stories, through centuries of human civilization, romancing the value of something no bigger than a fist. How *disappointing* it felt.

He thinks he can sense the same reaction bubbling up in Will as well; his stomach knots.

“I wish it hadn’t been him,” he says, and tips Mr. Pines’ heart into the basin with the rest of his pieces.

Hannibal feels a pang of possessiveness, but stops himself from indulging too fully in the jealousy.

“He barely did any good the first time.” Will continues, “I had wanted to stop thinking, just for a little while, but he couldn't even let me have that. He isn’t *worth* being here, Hannibal. I wish you’d brought me something *better*.”

He feels the words like a slap to the face, grits his teeth against the brunt of them. And yet, he understands the criticism. He’s right: Will deserved more.

He can try harder.

“You should have the honor of selection.”

Will completes his thought, speaking down into the red slick mess, “Next time?”

“Next time.”

Chapter 16

Chapter Notes

> if you're subscribed to this story, you're an angel and i truly appreciate your interest. you've also perhaps noticed the delay in posting was longer than normal for me. lots of personal stuff came up, mostly good, that made me slow down with writing. i won't promise an update schedule going forward, but i will say i have plans. my apologies to those that prefer to know exactly when things will wrap up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

It felt a bit like an itch. Some irritation layers deep that caught the edge of one's attention over and over the more you tried to ignore it. It was like that, but not exactly. It wasn't that he tried to ignore it; that might imply remorse. But the feeling - that building prickling coming from somewhere between the vertebrae of his spine. A persistent, dynamic dry sting that just kept rearing up for the days that followed. It felt a bit like an itch.

The night after, he hadn't slept. He'd vibrated through the rest of the day, time flashing along in the familiar way it would when he used to goad it on with ketamine. When he'd bring his own drugs to the bars. When he'd need to go under too badly to leave it to the luck of the lure. Time skipped then, sometimes in a panicked way, but usually not. Usually, like the day after, he'd just find his hours clipped together, scene after scene after scene, jolting inconsistency between takes that amused more than alarmed. Snap snap snap.

As he flicked from bedroom to garden to study, Hannibal spent hours in the kitchen, an opera Will didn't recognize accompanying his work. The tonal quality would be soothing, he supposed, if it wasn't for the jolting and shifting his dissociation provided. Hannibal would check on him periodically, his clean hands sliding across the shallow scars that littered Will's arms and torso. He'd slink up from behind him, curl up around him, breathe deeply and sigh contendedly, kiss his earlobe or his shoulder or his jaw and then unwrap himself once more to finish up the butchering.

Will was beside him, sometimes. Other times in the garden, other times laying naked on the ruined sheets of Pines' bed, face smothered in the stench of what remained. Hannibal let him wander, occasionally returning to him to remind him that he was there. That moments were passing. That the day was slipping.

He doesn't remember what happened that afternoon, except in snippets of synesthetic colors that smelled like magnolia and raw honey. The music played on, long into the evening. He felt it wrap around him and keep him from shivering when the stars came out. The music was a blanket for when Hannibal wasn't immensely around him instead, possessive and running nails along the curve of his naked back and up, cupping the back of his neck in his grasp.

Time did behave eventually, later into the evening. When it smoothed out Hannibal stayed with him, laid him down into his lap and ran fingers through the mess of curls as he sobbed, shook violently with them, gagged once on the crushing vacuum that became his chest. He had watched Hannibal lean down and lick at the salty tracks, then felt as he bit at the edge of his lip. He definitely felt when Hannibal reared back and slapped him hard, across the face, like Will had done to red head.

Will kissed back the next time he'd come down seeking his lips.

The meat tasted acidic, even when submitted to Hannibal's extensive culinary acumen. That lingering tingling taste from licking a battery. Corrosive.

They tried three different preparations, then when Will opened the fridge next time all evidence of redhead was gone.

Will replaced food with whiskey around two pm the day after, when Hannibal had gone to the hospital. He tried, but he couldn't get the memory of the taste out of his mouth. Some ten hours later, Hannibal found him passed out in the garden.

Two days later, when he finally came down enough to sleep properly without booze, he dreamed of the stream and the bodies. He stood at the edge of the water, which felt like nothing at all, so perfect was the temperature. He saw himself - in pieces - bob past again and again and again, then suddenly he was pulled under, the water thick like mud, clogging his mouth and nostrils. It felt unsteady, coagulated. It clasped at him from ankles and wrists and he let it take him down. The stream couldn't have been more than a few feet deep, though his ear drums burst quickly from the pressure. Then, whirring, painful silence.

When he woke the next morning, things got a little easier. He never forgot about the phone, stashed now in a back corner of a spare bedroom, but he began to feel he didn't need it as much as he once did.

The water has cooled enough that he is no longer ringed pink from the scald. Hannibal’d drawn the bath, keeping the level well below his shoulders, even when he slumped.

Sleeves rolled up, Hannibal moves the sea sponge along his spine, bringing water up to bead down his uninjured shoulder.

“How is it feeling?” he asks.

Will thinks for some time before answering honestly, “Uneven.”

Hannibal chuckles, a warm sound like cherry wood or honeysuckle. The sensation runs up him like a scurrying mouse, and he shivers visibly.

“Would you see it balanced, if it were up to you?” Hannibal questions, his fingers kneading the soapy water out of the sponge as he scrubs the bare skin gently.

“Is it up to me?”

Hannibal pauses, for a moment, before placing the sponge down. He begins working on the buttons of his shirt. As they come undone, one by one, he gives Will a small smile that registers halfway between devoted and destroyed.

“Do you subscribe to a fatalistic worldview, Will?” he asks, slipping one arm from the crisp lines of his dark dress shirt. “Are you not in command of your future?”

The nails of his fingers scrape slightly on the bottom of the tub as his hands twitch for want of action. He keeps the rest of his body calm, takes a breath that is neither too deep or too measured. Casual.

"I feel less in control by the minute."

After a beat, he turns to look towards Hannibal, but any reaction to his confession has rippled over his features and stilled. He watches Hannibal as he stands and slips out of his slacks, folding them neatly onto a nearby stool. He shimmies some in the oversized tub, anticipating Hannibal’s move to slip in behind him.

It feels good, having him curve his body around his. Feeling the press of rough hair play across the too sensitive edges of the square on his shoulder. He makes a small, noncommittal noise, then lets his body decide what to do next, slouching down and into the concave of Hannibal’s chest.

“It’s coming time for you to demonstrate your prowess over fate, Will,” Hannibal says to the thin skin behind his ear, where the warm air sends hairs on end, anticipating.

“What do you have in mind?” he asks, because he’s sure there is something. While he lets Hannibal's hands roam over his skin, he mentally arms himself. Just in case.

“I return to Baltimore in a little under two weeks. I find the idea of you not coming with me dissatisfying."

Will lets out a tired sigh. Moving. Not exactly the challenge he was braved for.

"I don't have a job anymore," he says, as if that explains so much more: there's nothing keeping me here; we could leave tomorrow. He thinks, guiltily, of Zoe, and considers whether to tell Hannibal in advance or just show up with her in tow.

It's easier, he finds it, the less he worries about what is right and focuses instead on what feels right. The powerful, skilled fingers wrapping around him, the tender nip of Hannibal's teeth against his neck. These things feel right.

The sweet snap crackling of bones, the taste of sweat beading down a bloodied forehead, wrung from the effort of destroying what he deems unworthy. These things felt right, too, he reflects.

He allows himself to feel an edge of hopefulness at the thought that he need not disappoint either of them.

Hannibal leans in, the edge of his lips against the rim of his ear. It tickles when he speaks.

"I hadn't anticipated bringing back my souvenirs."

He nudges his head back, making a cradle for Hannibal's lips in his neck.

"I don't have any plans for being a souvenir," he replies.

He feels the slick tip of canines on his scrubbed skin, lets the corner of his mouth pull up, allows the small burst of dopamine. The closeness of Hannibal is a relief to a loneliness he rarely admits to. His hands come alive, claws dragging up the strong, wiry muscle along Hannibal's calves.

Hannibal's mouth opens to worry flesh, pulling out a low, hungry noise from Will.

"Again," he gasps.

He does it again, with teeth.

There is an abusive edge to how Hannibal gnaws greedily at sinew and skin. It hurts, rips open a primal urge to fight back the beast that has him by the throat. He squirms a fraction, and feels Hannibal's mouth move to smile.

Hannibal's breath comes out more evenly than Will's. More in control. It makes Will want to slide into a placating role, where his satisfaction will blossom from seeing Hannibal pleased. That - more than most things - feels right, too.

"You still have magnificent potential Will," Hannibal says.

Feeling the slightest suggestive touch, he gets up onto his knees to let them both splash their way into a new position. He's immediately crowded by Hannibal pressing into him, hands claiming the territory of his shoulders, his chest, his stomach. The solid body behind him pushes them both forward, and folds him over the heavy rim of the large basin. It crushes the edges of his ribs, and his hands fly out to awkwardly brace himself. The tub is monumental; even folded as he is, his palms barely make contact with the floor.

"I don't care about my potential," he manages to gasp out, the edge of the tub jutting into his diaphragm, making him sound even more winded.

Hannibal makes what sounds like a tsk noise behind him, but grabs to spread his cheeks all the same. His hole, still pliant, still loose, squeezes tight when the air hits, causing Hannibal to let out an appreciative exhale.

With them, there is little work up. Around one another, they exist in a state of near perpetual eagerness, some churning need to press closer, burrow in further to each other.

The water does little good to lessen the friction as Hannibal pushes against his rim. He is relentless though, spearing into him a thrust at a time. He can feel himself rip, where he hasn't healed properly since their last forceful bout. The sting of the water against the torn edges of

his hole feels as satisfying at the stretch when Hannibal pushes fully in with some effort. The last inch makes them both rumble with a base approval.

Folded over the edge, his ribs bruise more with each forceful thrust, soaking the marble around the tub and pushing him more onto his hands for support. At this angle, everything hurts: the strain of keeping balance on slippery tile, the stab of Hannibal deep inside him, smashing his stomach hard with every thrust. He focuses on the twinge where his muscles spasm around the wound in his shoulder, and how the splashing water still stings the gashes over his knuckles. These things feel right too.

Will lets out a small cry when Hannibal adjusts just *enough* and his cum is pushed out of him in half-satisfying successive thrusts. His ass clenches and unclenches involuntarily around Hannibal's cock, seeming to pull him in deeper, make every push ignite a more ferocious electric fire in his groin.

Finally, when his arms scream from the effort of holding himself up, when Hannibal fucks hard, harder, harder up in him with barely a change in his breathing, Will gives up. He lets his body go limp, makes Hannibal have to grab frantically at his neck and pull him bodily up to keep him where he needs him to be.

The endorphin rush that he feels from letting go overpowers him when Hannibal shifts his grip to the front of his neck. Thumb and forefinger on either side of his windpipe, the pressure pushes out a feeling of blissful uncertainty of whether he can stay conscious like this for very long.

Hannibal pulls him further up, pressing his wet chest roughly into his back. He hisses, but it's quickly covered by a moan. He feels delicate, damaged, at the mercy of the man inside him. Hannibal shifts, hits him in exactly the right place and it's too much. It feels like he's been rubbed raw inside.

"I would see you realize your potential. To squander it would be a sin." Hannibal says, continuing.

Will is a live wire, hips writhing quietly on Hannibal. He's given in to the sensations, doesn't give a *damn* about potential sin, he is living breathing eternal damnation made flesh. To realize anything seems so unnecessary to him that he doesn’t deign a response.

When Hannibal is unsatisfied waiting, he feels the grip on his neck twitch tighter, then his mouth is being forced open by Hannibal's fingers, which soon hold onto his lower jaw by the teeth. The pressure to open his mouth wider seems to make the thing unhinge; he feels more than hears the loud *pop* that it makes. Then burning pain.

“I hope you won’t disappoint me,” Hannibal says with contempt.

Suddenly, something wide and plastic is shoved into his mouth, his jaw still pulled to nearly hanging open with Hannibal’s other hand.

It takes him a fraction of a second to realize it’s his cell. Flipped closed, it stretches his mouth open, pushes his tongue far enough back that he immediately begins to gag. With one hand he

finds the edge of the tub, with the other he locks around Hannibal's wrist, trying to force him to move. It’s no use. He can’t breathe.

Hannibal holds himself inside. He is pushing the phone so deep into his mouth, he feels something tear.

Will loses consciousness unsure of whether he will awake.

Chapter End Notes

i'm on twitter as @trikemily and can also be reached here or below should you have burning questions or passing thoughts.

Chapter 17

Chapter Notes

some gore.

Even though the house is tidy, the smell of dog is as apparent to him as it was the first night he'd taken Will home. Something etched into the memory of the walls and furniture and floorboards.

He takes his time, collecting a compromise of what is both acceptable aesthetically to him and acceptable pragmatically to Will. White button downs, inoffensive dark suit pants and solid-coloured lounge wear. He hopes he'll be allowed to supplement the wardrobe, in time. If time allows, that is.

He hears the creak of the front porch boards moments before the jingle of keys into the lock. It's not surprise he feels, nor is it fear of trespassing into Will's life or even being caught. It's a spark of curiosity that cascades in his mind a series of future timelines that he may peruse and ultimately decide upon.

He folds and places the clean undershirt into the duffle bag and walks out of the bedroom towards the front door.

The woman reacts the way he knows is appropriate, but can't seem to mimic. Her eyes wide, when the door swings open before her she takes a step back and sharply inhales. He's pleased to see her hand go to the side of her waist band instead of moving to cover her heart.

He politely ignores her sudden surprise. "Can I help you?" he asks, a gentle smile playing over his lips.

The woman hesitates for a moment, blinks several times too many, but then regains herself and some added skepticism to boot.

"Who are you?" She asks, her hand still hovering over the handle of her gun.

Hannibal smiles wider, a friendly warm smile that has the effect of relaxing her, however slightly. "My name is Hannibal," he replies, offering his hand so she is forced by common courtesy to shake, thereby taking her hand away from her sidearm. "I am a friend of Will's."

Her brows furrow at this; he registers no hint of recognition. *Interesting.*

"Thompson. His partner." she adds, defensively. "I've never heard Will mention you..." She trails off.

"Is that terribly out of character, for Will to keep his private and professional lives separate?" he tilts his head as he asks, then reciprocates the small chuckle that Thompson lets out in response.

"Sorry, you're right. I'm being rude." She pulls her hand away from his and runs it anxiously through her dark brown hair. "I've just… he quit abruptly. He told you?" Hannibal nods, and bids her continue with a slight raise of his brow. "He'd been seeming… off for a bit, but I didn't expect he'd just leave like that. I- he has me watching Zoe. I was coming for more of her toys - I don't suppose you know where he is?"

He takes a moment, considering the forking paths ahead of him. He keeps his hands from twitching, then bows his head apologetically before he speaks, "I'm sorry, we've been exceptionally neglectful. Yes, Will is - I've had him as a guest at my home since just before he resigned." He pauses to let the truth sink in, registers with some gratification the surprise that hits Thompson at the confession.

"He never mentioned a partner, but I must admit a carelessness on my part for not asking about coworkers. I should have known better than to assume Zoe would be with anyone except a trusted friend."

"I- you- sorry, I didn't know he was- I guess I just assumed he dated wom- anyway, I'm sorry. It doesn't matter. I just… pardon me- Hannibal? He never talked about you."

Didn't he? He examines her closely, watches the pupils of her eyes flash out before they contract again.

"Will has been unwell, I'm sorry to say. You'll have to forgive him for not contacting you sooner." He glances at Thompson's empty hands. No bag for dog toys.

"Of course. Look," her lips purse. "Just - will you ask him to call me? When he's feeling better?"

Hannibal nods. A silent few seconds stretch out between them, then Thompson turns and begins down the short path to her car.

At the last moment, Hannibal calls out, "What are you doing tomorrow evening? I was planning to try a new recipe; seeing a friendly face may be rejuvenating for Will."

Thompson hesitates only a moment before accepting. They exchange details and Hannibal lets a genuine smile slip as he closes the door and returns to collect more of Will's things.

When he wakes, the first sensation that reaches his brain is fiery hot, a burning that is centred in the middle of his gut. His hand reflexively moves to cover himself, but he flinches away at the sharp raw pain that his light touch erupts.

More tenderly, he starts to shift so that he might sit up, but something stops him from propping himself up on his elbow. Groggily, he looks over at his wrist to see he's manacled to the late red-head's bed.

The way fury and disappointment churn in his stomach makes him feel like he's going to be ill. He tries to twist to angle himself towards the bedside, only to realize both of his feet are secured as well. His nostrils flare with indignation.

He grapples with the restraint with his free hand, but it's useless. Short of breaking his hand or picking the lock (*With fucking what?!* His mind screams), the thick metal shackle will stay tight and clammy around his wrist. The cuffs around his ankles feel different. He rips the bed sheets off to examine them, gingerly twisting his body to grab at the right leg. If there are buckles, they're well hidden, and he can't reach them as he is. He lets out a small frustrated growl.

"Hannibal!" he says loudly, because he's not fucking laying here for a moment longer than he needs to. He doesn't understand exactly why he's restrained - why he *hurts* so much, but he knows who he needs to speak to.

Silence.

"HANNIBAL!" he shouts, louder this time so the name absorbs into the plasterboard walls. His throat stings when he shouts; a memory flash of choking on something wide and hard eludes him.

He tenderly places his unrestrained hand upon his stomach. The pain shoots through him, rough and unmedicated. Carefully he peels his shirt up. There's gauze taped from sternum to belly-button. Slowly, mindful of the fresh hurt, he begins to remove the tape.

What he finds beneath is a vertical incision, about four inches long, just above his navel. The steri-strips closing the wound are methodically placed half an inch apart, beneath them only a thin red line belying the fact that he's been cut open.

More flashes come to him then, so fast that they rush him and send his head back hard onto the pillow.

The bathtub. The phone, gagging him, and then… darkness. Groggy amorphous memories more like physical sensations than lived history. His wet body, dropped inelegantly onto something cold and hard. The sharp edge of what must have been a scalpel. The ripping noises of what he can now place as tape.

He screws up his face, angry at himself for not remembering anything more useful. But no, it's not himself he needs to be furious at.

"HANNIBAL!" he bellows, and this time, he hears movement elsewhere in the house.

"Will." Hannibal's tone is curt but polite. He enters the room, then moves over to his bedside and examines the incision.

Will's free arm shoots out to grab at Hannibal's tie, discourteously ripping a shirt button in the process. Hannibal's lip twitches, but he bends himself elegantly over to hover above Will.

"What did you do to me?" he seethes, his grip twisting to pull Hannibal closer still. Their faces are inches apart. He can feel the warmth of his breath against his cheeks. He has half a mind to lunge forward, teeth first.

"Far less than what you were intending for me." His eyes hold steady on Will's; he speaks the words nearly into Will's agape mouth.

He clenches his jaw and breathes in deeply through his nose. This is Hannibal riling him up, and it's working. The betrayal he feels is monumental.

His words sneak out from between gritted teeth, "Be careful with the weight of those accusations you're throwing, Hannibal."

Hannibal's hand wraps around Will's tight grip and he allows him to peel his fingers from off of the tie. Hannibal straightens up and looks down at him with a degree of disinterest that Will's not sure he's ever shown towards him. It makes a knot contract tightly in his sore throat.

When it looks as though Hannibal is going to retreat without further discussion, Will loses his composure. "Get these goddamn shackles off, Hannibal!" he yells to his back, which makes him pivot to regard Will once more.

"What do you want here?" he spits, lifting his head up as much as he feels comfortable given the fresh incision through his stomach muscles.

Hannibal looks at him for a long time before answering. His fingers tap idly at his side in the silence. "I'd like to return to our aborted conversation about boundaries. For your safety."

The words ring memorable in his mind, and feel no less sinister now than they had the first time Hannibal has spoken them. This time, knowing more, he registers a curious lack of fear for being directly threatened by a cannibal.

"Get. Me. Out." he says again, more insistent than before. He tugs at the restraints as though to remind Hannibal what he means.

"For me," Hannibal goes on as though Will hasn't said a word. "I abhor rudeness. A lack of conscientiousness when telling lies is something that I'm not willing to tolerate, Will."

Will roars in anger and thrashes towards Hannibal as best he can with three limbs locked to the bed. The sudden movement shoots a stabbing pain from his stomach through to his shoulder and back again. Even the edges of the scar on his chest ache in sympathy. He lets out a hiss and settles back down.

"Tomorrow evening, Ms. Thompson will be joining us for dinner. I hope you can be more courteous for a guest." Hannibal informs Will, and it's like all the air has left the room.

"What did you do?" He asks in warning.

“Only invited a colleague to our home, Will.”

Hannibal moves forward until he’s within grasp of Will once more. He retrieves the discarded sheet from the floor and carefully drapes it back over his naked form. Will feels more humiliated by the gesture than he did in his nudity.

“You invited her to-” he pauses, when the pieces come together. “Do you believe that you have so much control over me that I’d kill for you?” he asks, unwilling to hide the disdain from his voice.

“You have before.”

“No, Hannibal. I haven’t.”

This quiets Hannibal for a moment, and he takes the opportunity to retreat to the door frame into the hall. “Rest up, Will. I'm due at the hospital shortly. If you still want out after, we can discuss it.”

“Don’t you dare leave, Hannibal! Don't! WHAT DID YOU DO TO ME?!” he screams, and the door closes.

The next several hours blur together, demarcated by the onset of a low-grade but sudden fever. The edges of his incision throb in time with his heart beat. He can’t tell from this angle, but when a light beam dances over his bare torso, he swears he thinks he sees more than just natural swelling protruding his stomach by the stitches.

His bladder aches; he knows he’ll piss himself eventually, but it feels worthwhile to delay the inevitable in this instance. For the last hour or so, the prickly feeling has grown more insistent and he writhes at times with a false hope that he might reposition himself to take his mind away from letting go.

It’s for this reason that he does rest, albeit fitfully and not without wicked daydreams of body parts and possessive oceans and the slick taste of rare meat sliding over his tongue. Once, he wakes half-hard, having carved Thompson up before Hannibal and pulled out her insides so that they may have a basket within which to display the body parts they’d collected from the river.

The light from outside has faded, though the air in the room when he wakes is stuffy to near choking. Dusk casts long shadows that stripe across his torso and seem to bend about the stitches.

It doesn’t matter what promises Hannibal gives of dinner parties and tomorrows, he needs to get out *now*. But fucking how. As he lays in the darkening room, a sense of finality sinks over him, heavy like a thick fog. He looks down listlessly at his supine form, unsure of what the fuck he’s supposed to be doing here, now.

Then, at once and fully formed, a thought snaps like a rubber band in his mind.

The phone.

The motherfucking phone.

Gently, his fingers trace over the edge of the surgical closures.

He's flush from just the idea, sweat springing up as beads on his forehead. He knows pain. Craves pain, more often. But this. This would require him to set-aside his self preservation in a way he didn't need to entertain with the drugs. This would be a conscious decision to see his limit and, if this was going to feel even remotely like he imagines, barrel full-speed past it.

He regards the six or so plastic strips that hold him together. Wrinkling his nose in disgust, he picks at the edge of one and carefully peels it back.

Immediately, the top layer of flesh gapes a fraction. He pulls a second strip off, and the taut skin parts enough to see the change in texture between skin and stitches. They are all internal, exposed only when - he peels back a third one - the strips that were neatly fusing his skin back together are removed.

When the final skin closure is removed, Will takes a moment to compose himself. Examining the broad parting, the way the stitches pull at the meat beneath the skin, he feels a growing certainty about what he'll find underneath. He needs it out, maybe can use some piece of it to pick the locks. Something. *Anything.* Slowly, he empties his lungs until his stomach sucks in, pushing the last of the stale air out. Yes, there was clearly a bump there. There *must* be.

Fuck.

Lifting himself up however little he is able, he presses his fingers into his flesh. His finger loops around a single stitch, the spacing far enough apart that Will briefly considers how Hannibal must have adapted normal suturing techniques to allow for exactly this. The fucking bastard.

The first shot of pain as his finger curls in nearly whites his vision. The world is electric, blitzed out and shifting and for several long seconds, he feels he is surely going to pass out. He stays there, one finger dug into his stomach, hooked under a suture. Waiting. Then, he takes a single sharp breath and rips.

Dazzling is a suitable descriptor for the ferocity with which he feels the stitch rip out from beneath the skin. The flesh tears begrudgingly, and when he lifts his bloodied hand, he comes away with a single small looped stitch. Blood bubbles up from the edge of the wound, pools and spills over the smooth plane of his stomach.

He doesn't move for a long time, apart from the pained breathing he tries to subdue for the way it tugs at the stitches on every inhale. Finally, gritting his teeth, he tentatively touches at the open edge before pushing his finger back in. There isn't enough space - he'll need to rip out at least two more stitches if he wants to be able to get what is in him out.

The second stitch comes out with an angry whimper. The third with an aggravated roar.

He's bleeding more now; it's enough to obscure his view of inside. Clumsily with his free hand, he folds over the edge of the bedsheet and presses it, hissing, into the wound to sop up the blood.

It doesn't help. What he sees is nauseating, but not foreign. No hard plastic edge, no thick antenna. His lips part in a sneer as he pushes his fingers deeper in, at once coming in contact with the slippery outer casing of his stomach. He shakes in an effort to control himself, as he slides his fingers surreally over his insides, feeling for the object. At one point, when he considers whether Hannibal has hidden it *inside* his intestines, he does vomit. His hand clenches closed the small opening in an exaggerated fear that something might slip out as he twists to lean out over the bed. The bile burns his scratchy throat.

It continues like this, roaming fingers and dry retching, for some five minutes more. Time is a bullshit construct though, because it lasts longer than the whole of his memories of his time on the force. So dilated is his perception of it, he imagines he can think at a nanosecond timescale as he picks in between his organs, stretches out the wound to search thoroughly. And all he can think of - besides the pain - is what he'll do after. What he's going to do to Hannibal. Just as soon as he finds the fucking phone.

Finally, agonizingly, he slips his fingers out of himself and collapses back into the blood-soaked bedding. The pain has boiled up so much, he needs to stop. It doesn't matter.

There's nothing there anyway.

Chapter 18

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

He’s quiet when he returns to the house again, sometime past three am. In part it’s to keep from announcing his entrance to Will, who may be listening attentively upstairs. But if he’s being honest with himself, he steps lightly mostly because it feels a bit like trespassing into some befouled space. It’s not regret that he feels; more an acceptance that actions sometimes have undesirable consequences. He knows what he might find when he goes up the stairs. It may be the beginning of something beautiful. But, it may instead be nothing short of disappointment.

So he lingers downstairs for a time. Enough time to slip off his shoes, put away his satchel, and choose a recipe for tomorrow’s dinner. With or without Will, it'll happen. Either a becoming or a memorial. He spends some time planning accompanying dishes and crafting a shopping list.

He could go on like this most of the evening, convince himself that he should begin prep on some of the more elaborate dishes in advance. There are a hundred things he could distract himself with, but none can fully quiet his curiosity for what Will might have done. It’s too quiet in the house. It allows him to run worst case scenarios concurrently with dinner preparations.

What ifs bubble from the surface of his thoughts, but he chooses not to succumb to their temptation. He puts the shopping list down and makes himself go upstairs. If Will’s dead, he’s as much dead now as he ever will be. If he’s alive - well, that's preferable. Hannibal doesn’t allow himself to consider either the state that he might find him in, nor what he might need to do to intervene.

He climbs the stairs silently, avoiding the creaky third stair altogether. It’s easy, the sneaking, but foreign in his own space. It reminds him why he doesn’t often bring his work back into the home. Will has always been an exception, though.

The door opens silently onto a still room. Immediately, he notices Will’s shallow but harsh breathing, lit poorly in outline from a distant street lamp. Something in him unknots and his chest feels lighter, like a stack of books have been lifted, creaking off of his rib cage.

“I’ll kill you if you come any closer,” Will seethes, turning his head purposely away from Hannibal’s direction, but still regarding him through the reflection in the second floor window.

He smells the stench of the space before he sees it clearly, so blanketed in darkness are they. He closes his eyes for a moment to truly block out the light, and imagines what a beautiful gift might be waiting before him. How long did he look?

He flicks the light on.

The mess is substantial - nothing the room hasn't seen before, but still impressively crimson and slick. *The pain must have been excruciating,* he thinks before he gives Will's bloody form an encouraging smile.

"I can close you up again," Hannibal says, voice level. "If you wish."

Will is silent for a moment before he erupts, turning his head and the force of his fury towards Hannibal: "GIVE ME THE GODDAMN KEYS, HANNIBAL!"

"I have the materials in the dresser, just there," Hannibal continues, as though Will had said nothing at all. As though he hadn't just flinched away from the violence in his voice.

"Don't you fucking touch me," Will responds, his voice shaking. "DON'T FUCKING TOUCH ME!"

"Without cleaning, the wound is likely to infect. I can smell the sweetness of your fever from here, Will."

He watches Will's unbound hand close in a fist around the stained blankets. Will takes a shallow, considered breath. He speaks the words to the window rather than at Hannibal: "Give me what I need. Tell me what to do. Then get out."

Get out. Of the room, of the house. Just: out.

He steps forward to intervene, but Will takes his hand away from his stomach, letting the wound pull open. He waves it in the air for emphasis. "I swear to God, Hannibal, do not come closer. I will rip you open with my teeth if I have to."

A swelling pride bursts forth in him, and he stops walking, then bows his head in surrender. "Very well, Will," he says, a hint of satisfaction in his voice. "The key for your wrist is under the pillow."

Will's head snaps around to meet his eyes. The rage comes off of him in waves, hot enough to burn, even from this distance.

"You sonofa- " Will starts, but trails off. Awkwardly, he twists his free hand back and feels blindly for the key. His face shows a mixture of shock and horror when his fingers touch the small metal object. He brings it out and it slips into the lock effortlessly. Like that, his hand is free. Will doesn't bother trying to undo the restraints on his ankles: he isn't fearful of Hannibal. He doesn't need to get away from him. That isn't the concern here. He is simply mad. Enraged.

After a moment, Hannibal makes another attempt forward, this time clearly in the direction of the cabinets on the wall. Will's eyes convey his exhaustion, but he doesn't take them off of him as he collects the necessary materials. Once supplies are gathered and passed off - Will's fingers twitching when he accepts the shears from Hannibal's outstretched hand - the clean up and suturing itself are relatively straightforward.

Then, for a time, things settle. Will listens carefully to him as he describes how to clean and suture the wound. He gets lost in the focus necessary to patch himself up, and so too does Hannibal allow himself to get lost in Will. He doesn't consider whether he's gone too far in his retribution for Will's dishonesty. To Hannibal, this is merely a taking of control to see justice unfold. Unfortunate, at times. But necessary. Beautiful. And - most importantly - done.

Will's technique is sloppy. The end result is a mess that will scar poorly, Hannibal notes with a flare of delight. He wants to cover every inch of Will in marks of his own making - flay him of his previous life and leave him with new scars that only speak of their relationship. Distantly, he wonders when next Will will let him.

When the final suture is performed, Will falls back onto the bed, sweaty and shaking. The moments tick by; the only sound in the stifling room is Will's still-laboured breathing. Balance has been sought and acquired. To Hannibal, there is little else for him to do at this moment other than keep vigil by Will's bed as he rests.

He'll need to work, later, to ensure that Will understands the necessity of his cruelty, but that is a task for the morning. For now, he stands at the doorway, paying his respects, soaking in the magnificence of the man before him. He can stay up the rest of the dark morning and watch for signs of infection, bring ice for fever, change the linens, maybe help him with a shower. With Will here and alive and repaired, he entertains the possibility of a future.

In his reverie, he doesn't notice Will's icy glare. Hannibal doesn't move against it, instead he closes his eyes and sears into his memory the sights of what he has just witnessed. Of bloody hands and shaking fingers and oozing insides. Like every memory of Will, this one is given the attention it's due.

He comes out of it only when Will finally breaks the silence with a howl: "Get the fuck out, Hannibal. Get out. Get out. GET OUT!"

The incongruity of his words with the elation he's just indulged in hit him suddenly, and he finds himself taking a quick step back from Will as though struck. He looks to him, confused at first, but quickly understands. He's jumped too far ahead of himself; a habit he's tried to patiently cut out but that grows insistently in him regardless of his efforts. He's managed to hope - and in so doing, managed to ignore the truth of Will's indignation laying before him.

He supposes what might help now is an explanation, and he launches into a story of sacrifice for greater goods he read once when he was a boy. He gets only the first few words out however, when Will roars and launches a scalpel towards him. The blade hits him by the handle, but manages to cut a thin line down his arm as it tumbles down and bounces noisily upon the wood floor.

"Shut the fuck up, Hannibal. Just- STOP!" He shakes his head, a defeated, exhausted movement that seems to drain his body of whatever energy was left in it.

Will puts one hand on his bandages and creeps forward, turning more to the side than straight up so he can rock himself to sitting. It's pathetic, watching him struggle like this, but he

cannot think of anything he'd rather do. Will doesn't understand. They're even now, if he'll only just let them be. He tries to say as much, but Will shuts him up with a vicious growl.

With the other hand, Will fumbles around the bindings on his ankles. These weren't locked the same way his wrist was, and the discovery makes Will's face contort. He huffs loudly, then grabs his stomach and awkwardly begins to unfasten the straps one-handed.

The first step out of bed is bow legged, unsure, poorly balanced. He grips hard onto the bed for support and grimaces against what surely must be ferocious pain. Still, after a moment to collect himself, he shuffles towards the door, towards Hannibal. A prickling sort of anticipation builds with every step.

When he is within arms reach, Will stops and stares him down. Hannibal sees no acceptance there. He can feel the vitriol splash across his face. He's made a miscalculation, he realizes too late. Tears in his eyes, he steps aside.

Will moves past him, first to the bedroom where he disappears for a lengthy period punctuated by deep breathes and heavy noises like Will might be stumbling about the room drunk. Hannibal doesn't dare to move; stands immobile across the hall, listening.

Will doesn't make eye contact when he emerges. Hannibal knows because he cannot look away. Dressed now in what Hannibal had only just brought back, Will moves slowly but purposely towards the stairs.

After a few torturous moments, he is gone.

The twenty minute walk between Hannibal’s place and his own take nearly an hour at his shambling pace. As he rounds the corner, he is already half expecting to see Hannibal on the porch again, waiting. As such, he doesn’t stop his slow stagger when Hannibal stands as he approaches. Doesn’t look at him. Instead he continues on, past Hannibal, through the open door, and slams it shut, making no mistake about who may or may not be welcome in his home.

“Go home, Hannibal,” Will yells through the oakwood when he hears Hannibal’s soft knock on the front door. “I know you have a key, but I'd really rather you go fuck yourself.”

He stays by the door for what feels like ages. His heart pounds and his legs shake, wanting nothing more than to let go and send him down hard onto the floor. But he waits until finally, he hears the retreating footsteps of Hannibal’s brogues before collapsing carefully onto the couch.

The pain is heavy. It throbs from the exertion he’s just put himself though, but it’s dimmer than what it had been before. He closes his eyes against it and manages a fitful and neuroses-filled slumber. There, he is locked to the river’s bottom, while above the body parts sweep past.

Chapter End Notes

working on a couple other projects that I hope to share on ao3 soon!

Chapter 19

Chapter Notes

> This is the end! Or rather, I'm considering this the last chapter, with anything to follows as epilogue. More notes at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

When he does awake, hours later, the sun has risen enough to make him stick to his button-up, sweat clinging his curls to his forehead. Looking down, he's thankful there isn't a sticky red patch where buttons link through the fabric. His stitches must have held.

His body is hard with lingering tension and getting up makes him feel like he might crack apart at the seams. He goes slow - the only way he's able to, Hannibal has ensured - and lumbers into the small bathroom to clean himself.

In the shower, he can't close his eyes lest he see the river. Donders and her business partner. The red-head. All of them, mixed together in pieces.

He'd made the connection, days ago, but it's only now that he lets himself think it out in full. Hannibal had been careful, taking only portions of what he undoubtedly wanted from the two victims. He'd varied their deaths enough that they were delayed making a connection. Even just before he'd left the precinct for the last time, the two had not officially been lumped together as the same killer. Only a connection through association. Worthy of a joint investigation.

Hannibal had been careful, but that didn't mean he hadn't also been pretentious. Cocksure. Whereas the discovery of Donder's partner had been accidental, likely unintentional from Hannibal's perspective, there was nothing understated about Donders herself. Will doesn't need to close his eyes to bring to mind the massacre that they'd found at the equestrian farm.

What ingratitude had Donders inadvertently bequeathed onto Hannibal that he'd gone to such an effort - such a waste - to ruin her body just so? He didn't need to dig to know there must have been a connection between the pair and Hannibal: he'd spent enough time around him, heard him speak of courtesy and decency enough to know that their demise had been in their impoliteness. Hannibal's grievance with Donders had been orders of magnitude over what he held for her partner. Perhaps, he considered, her partner's only fault had been his association with Donders at all.

The water beats heavily against his back, and he stands in the stream, lost in thought. He'd fallen onto Hannibal to escape what he couldn't help falling into from work, only to find himself more full up with gore than ever before. He wonders whether Thompson will be the

next victim. Certainly it's Hannibal's intention. He only wonders whether, in his state, he stands a chance of getting her out of dinner alive.

"This is Thompson, hello," her voice is distracted. He imagines her behind her desk, pushing papers around to find a pad to jot down her overly neat notes that she attaches to every document they'd shared. Will shudders under a cold, piercing guilt. Not for the first time, he considers the way she might (*she will*, his brain supplies) look, stained red and in pieces before him.

"Thompson." His throat is parched from screaming; he croaks the word and then sets himself into a fit of coughing.

"Graham? Jesus, are you alright?" He can see her on the other line, recognition freezing her in place. "Where are you? Are you with Lecter?"

Another cough before he can soothe his throat enough to speak. "No, no. I'm okay. I'm not with Lecter, it's okay." He reassures, tries to make his voice sound more confident than he's ever felt when it comes to Hannibal.

"What the fuck is going on, Graham?" she swears, and he hears the way she leans her elbows on the crowded desk, pushing herself into her 'intensely listening' pose.

"You remember what I told you, the last time?" Will asks, though he knows the answer. They'd stayed inside her car for hours, him managing to answer her many questions without telling her anything at all. Lecter was mentioned without name, without form. Someone worth investigating. Someone worth risking his career over taking as much unapproved leave as he's taken.

"Jesus Christ, Graham. Will- " he closes his eyes against the use of his first name. That was a line they didn't cross with each other. Fuck. "No more bullshit. Who the hell is Lecter? Is he the one you were talking about? You're staying with him? *Are you sleeping with him?*" she whispers the last part, unwilling to out him even in the middle of whatever this is.

Will shakes his head, more tired than he's felt for days. Part of him - a huge part of him - wants to hang up the phone, get into his car, and just start driving. Wants to say fuck it, let Thompson choose her own fate, and get as far away from here as he is able. Check the papers for mentions of her, of Hannibal, send money to the family when he gets another job.

He swallows around the rock in his throat. "Do you trust me?" he says, stupidly, because his mind has gone blank of any whisper of a plan he'd had before picking up the phone.

"What the fuck, Graham, what are you-" she begins, but stops herself. "Of course, you fucker. You're my *partner*."

"Don't come tonight. Don't dig into him. Don't involve Moreau or anyone at the office. Just leave your desk, get in your car, and go." He tries to imbue every word with the weight they deserve, but he hears her unbelieving puff of an exhale and knows he's already lost.

"I'm serious, Thompson. Do not come tonight. He'll kill you. If you stay, you will die." He pleads with her, uselessly, he knows, but he has to try.

"What the hell has he done to you?" She says, horrified. "What is *going on*?"

There's a scratching on the other end, like Thompson is shuffling the phone from one ear to the other, maybe to her shoulder. He can't hear anything beyond a muffled mumbled exchange, but it's enough for the hairs on the back of his neck to stand up in recognition.

"Thompson! THOMPSON!" he yells into the phone, trying to get her attention. The mumbling continues, then she's back on the line.

"Lecter's here. He's says you're hurt?" He hears the words, listens to them echo about his mind.

"He's lying. Whatever he says, he's lying." He continues to shout. "You need to get out of there. Now!"

"Graham, I'm a big girl. I'm not going anywhere."

Will rubs his face in aggravation. "Thompson - Kelly. Please. Don't go with him," he pleads as a last effort.

There's a crackling like the phone slips off her shoulder and then a small silent pause. Hannibal speaks next into the receiver. "Will you be joining us for dinner tonight?"

His smooth, controlled voice chills his blood.

"What can I do here, Hannibal?" - to make this stop, to keep her safe.

He pictures the slow smile that undoubtedly spreads over Hannibal's face before he speaks again. "I'd like to revisit our boundaries, Will. Please, I only mean to entertain."

"Fuck you."

Hannibal ignores him. "Dinner is at nine. I'm afraid I've only made enough for our small party. Please don't bring any extra guests."

The line goes dead.

Will shows up just after seven, his walk to the home hobbled by the tear through his stomach. He's come alone, but not for lack of consideration. This is, he reasons, the only way Thompson has a glimmer of hope.

So he shows up early. Not because he expects he'll have beat Thompson there. Only that he hopes that Hannibal hasn't decided the play of things isn't worth it and already has her cooking for a nine o'clock dinner time.

When he opens the door, not bothering to knock on what he has until recently started thinking of *their* door, his heart lurches. The sound of her voice trails in from the depths of the house, back in the kitchen. He's not too late.

Then he sees the platter. It's set away from the main foyer, more directly in the walkway into the parlor. Where it has been before. Undoubtedly meant as a presentation. It looks exactly the same: pristine silver holding a single syringe, an antiseptic wipe and a cotton swab.

His hand wavers over the needle.

"Will, come join us in the kitchen," Hannibal says because of course he's sensed that he's arrived. Maybe fucking smelled him, if he wasn't quiet enough not to disturb on entry. "Thompson is sous-chefing for me but we could use a bartender, if you wouldn't mind."

Like that, he decides. He grabs the syringe and pockets it, then draws his fucking gun.

Thompson is in the hall and on him in seconds, sending off shocks of agony as she crushes him into a hug. He must whimper, because she backs off nearly immediately with a look of grave concern.

"Jesus Graham, you look awful."

And he does. He's sweating already, the fever still holding strong despite his delicate care to clean the cut again before coming in. He hasn't missed the hot red lines that are veining up from one edge of the incision, he's just choosing to ignore them for the time.

He's pale, too. The kind of pale that comes from spending too much time fucking and not enough time taking care of himself. From spending twelve fucking hours locked to a fucking death bed, scrambling inside his guts for a key he'd been sleeping on the whole time. That sort of pale.

So yeah, he doesn't look great.

With a degree of hesitation, he holsters his gun at Thompson's look of concern. He gives her a small, suffering smile. "Been a rough few days, I suppose," he says, holding his hand over his stomach defensively.

Will leads them into the kitchen, away from where the syringe no longer lies. He doesn't have enough time to come up with a good plan; Hannibal is going to know he's taken it, if he doesn't know already. The small cylinder feels rotund in his pocket, the needle catching the inside of his shirt as he moves through the space. He's going to pierce himself if he doesn't figure out what to do next.

He looks at Hannibal from across the island. He looks up at him like a human being, like he feels remorse, or sadness, or longing. It's an illusion, Will tells himself, but goddamn does he want to believe it. It makes anger roil in his belly.

Chewing his lip, he decides on the forking path before them. He takes the syringe out of his pocket and places it plainly on the counter in front of Thompson and Hannibal.

“The fuck?” she swears, looking from him to the needle.

“The fuck.” Will confirms, looking at no one other than Hannibal.

Hannibal makes a show of wiping his hands clean upon his apron, drawing out the moment. Thompson has included him now in the dance her eyes are making rapidly between the men and the needle and back again.

“An apology.” Hannibal says, and lays his clean hands palm up at his sides. As if to say: see what I offer you. See what sacrifice I provide. Because of you. For you.

Immediately, Will knows the syringe was never meant for him. Or rather, it was meant exactly for him. To deliver Hannibal's penance. A twisted tit for tat. To sedate him and get Thompson out. Or to allow them to haul Hannibal in. Whatever he deems appropriate.

Less of an apology. More of another fucking mind game.

Will's face twists with disgust. He doesn't want to dwell on the feeling of dread that bubbles up in his throat when he considers bringing Hannibal in. It feels like drowning. Like suffocating. His hand slams down on the counter but he doesn't curse.

He needs to get out of here. *Now.*

"Why? Just let us go," he pleads, tears prickling at the corners of his eyes. Nothing makes sense here. He's the one with the needle. With the gun. With the partner. Why does he feel so fucking trapped all of a sudden?

"You have the ability to leave." Hannibal says, and begins to undo his apron. Slowly. With care. He folds it, soiled but still starched, onto the marble countertop. He is a perfectly put together version of himself, presented before them.

"Except that -"

Then the other shoe drops.

Hannibal clears his throat, giving Will a sad sort of look before returning his attention to Thompson. “I’ve asked you over to confess - “ Hannibal begins.

Will understands now. There never was a fucking choice. Only the illusion of one. He snarls up at Hannibal, which causes him to pause. He lunges then, grabbing the syringe and lashes forward with no aim or purpose beyond reaching the man and trying to quiet his tongue.

“Don’t,” he spits. “Don’t you *fucking* dare.”

They struggle for the briefest of moments, out away from the island and into the main space of the kitchen. Will is easily overpowered though, his hands captured and twisted behind and up his back. It makes the scars on his chest and on his back twinge with strain. The way his arms twist cause a stitch to slip from his stomach and his shirt immediately blooms red. Thompson lets out a surprised noise, pulls out her gun and trains it uncertainly towards them. Even at this close of a range, it’s a risky shot, the two of them wound so closely together.

Tears well up and spill over Will’s cheeks. The pain he feels is astonishing, but it’s a preemptive hollow loss that grips him more, makes him start to shake.

"Please. Don’t do this," he cries.

Hannibal lifts a single hand to smooth a stray curl from the side of Will’s face and tucks it behind his ear. He leans forward, speaking the words directly into Will's ear, all the while keeping Thompson in his sight. “I killed Ms. Gemma Donders. And her partner. And a great deal many more.”

Will’s stomach drops.

Thompson swears quietly. Will feels Hannibals lips on his neck, smiling. Even feet away from the barrel of a gun, he shows no signs of fear.

“Graham?” Thompson asks, her gait sure now as she points her weapon towards Hannibal and her partner.

Will's throat feels too tight to form words, so instead he locks eyes with Thompson and nods. Once. Enough. Fates sealed. Fuck Hannibal for forcing this.

“Let him go,” she commands, and Hannibal raises his hands up, letting Will flounder without his support. The smile has reached his eyes now, the early hints of laugh lines crinkling the skin there.

For a moment, no one moves. Thompson trains the two of them in her sights. Hannibal remains a statue. The air is thick and when Will's head falls, it feels like it slices through it like a hot knife. Tears fall fat onto the tiles. Thompson calls him over again, her voice confused but strong. He hesitates a step, but eventually moves the short distance between Hannibal and her. Beside Thompson, he turns to face Hannibal. Through the blur, he can't help notice that he is still smiling.

Thompson shouts for Hannibal to put his hands above his head and their movements flow like water. He hears the stream loudly in his ears even as he watches Hannibal's arms raise up, fingers lacing behind the blond hair. He experiences it in slow motion, watching Thompson approach, her gun moving to one hand as she reaches with her other into her back pocket for her cell phone. His mind fills in the time and space: he sees Hannibal, in a police car, behind bars, in a jumpsuit. He smells the burnt hair at his execution.

Like that, the world snaps back into full speed.

Thompson doesn't have time to react. In two long strides, Will’s behind her. The needle plunges to the hilt into her neck.

Will lets her fall like a rag doll to the ground.

"I'll never forgive this." His voice is quiet.

Only then does Hannibal's smile falter. He nods once, more to himself.

"You will."

Chapter End Notes

You'll notice the counter says one more chapter. Now that you've read it, you'll understand that there's more to tell. I get that. This just felt like the right time for this story to end. So consider the next installment, whenever it happens to be, the epilogue. And assume I love these characters too much to let them go so easily.

To those that read this, thank you dearly! I love these versions of Will and Hannibal and have had such a wonderful experience spending time with them and sharing them with you. Your comments make my heart burst.

End Notes

I'm on twitter as trikemily - come say hi or yell or whatever at me.

Works inspired by this one

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